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Love Stories of the American Girl

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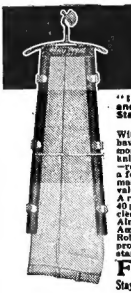

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"You mean," Mittie choked, "you want me to pretend I'm Lady Marjorie!"

Her Bartered Beauty

Cinderella of the box car! Innocent Mittie leaves her sordid home when a fairy godmother waves a wand of wealth. But she does not know—

By Beulah Poynter

Author of "Cinderella on Broadway," etc.

CHAPTER I

CINDERELLA

MITTIE wiped her wet arms on her faded calico apron and went to the door of the box car. Old Asa, her grandfather, lean, leather-faced, with grizzled hair falling in a tangle over his bleary eyes, was sitting on the steps, smoking a cob pipe.

She shaded her eyes, pansy blue with long fringing lashes, from the glare of the morning sun, and stared at the strip of track ending at the tumble-down railway station, which had long

since been abandoned to decay among the rank weeds and creeping vines.

She was so tired, so unutterably weary of it all—the box car, its squalor, the ramshackle station, the pile of clothing to be washed, the dreary, never-changing existence! Yesterday she had had a brief glimpse of another life, and it had made her own all the harder to bear; yet even now she wondered at her lack of reticence toward the unknown woman who had leaped from her horse and inquired why Mittie was crying.

Never before, in all her seventeen years, had the girl given vent to her misery; and now her cheeks burned when she recalled all that she had said. She had told Mrs. Druce that her grandfather was a drunkard; that he had been blamed for the terrible forest fire twelve years ago; that she couldn't have friends because of his shame; that school had been denied her for the same reason. Why, she had almost told about Leonard Lalock and his hateful love for her.

It must have been because Mrs. Druce had seemed so sympathetic. Moreover, Mittie had been half out of her mind with fear of Lalock, and with her own hopeless passion for the handsome young man whom she had seen on the mountainside day after day as he rode by on his black pony. Thank Heaven, she hadn't told Mrs. Druce about him! The lady from the Summit House would have laughed at her. A squatter girl in love with a young man who could spend the winter in Roan City, playing golf and polo and tennis, dancing and riding on horseback—a squatter girl who lived in a

box car with disreputable old Asa Blaine! It was something to laugh at —something to make the gods laugh.

She sighed, and the sound attracted old Asa's attention.

"Are you tired, Mittie?" he asked.

His voice was well modulated and indicative of culture—strangely at variance with his appearance; and he had a marked English accent.

"A little. There are more clothes than usual," replied the girl, who possessed the same accent, without any of the drawl habitual to North Carolina mountaineers.

"You wear yourself out climbing old Roan Top," Asa said, yawning. "You are strong enough, but three or four miles on that mountain is a little too much when you've work to do."

She did not reply. After another scrutiny of the railroad tracks and the mountainside, she went into the box car and returned to her labor; but neither her heart nor her mind was with her task. In vain she argued that she must not think of the man who had won her love. He did not know of her existence, and probably they would never meet. If he had ever seen her, she was less to him than the dust under his horse's hoofs.

The girl who had been with him the day before—did he love her? She had been laughing up into his dark eyes in a way that seemed possessive. She was beautiful. Her flaxen hair gleamed like gold in the sunlight, her skin was as pink and white as a baby's.

Mittie glanced down at her own shapely arms. They were bronzed by the summer sun, and her hands, while small and well shaped, had been reddened from contact with soapsuds. Mrs. Druce had told her that she was lovely, that she had beautiful eyes, that her copper hair was like burnished bronze and her features perfect in regularity; but of what use was beauty to Mittie Blaine? Beauty was of value only if it gave one what one desired, and she knew that hers would wither and fade away in this hopeless environment.

She did not hear the low buzz of a motor car engine, and was unaware that a smart sedan had driven practically to her door until her grandfather called to her.

"Mittie, here's a lady who wishes to see you," he said.

Before she could brush her curls from her forehead, which was moist from her exertion, a lady appeared in the doorway. Mittie gave a little start, and the warm color flooded her lovely face. Mrs. Druce! What was she doing here?

"You—you want to see me?" she stammered.

"Yes. May I come inside?"

MITTIE hesitated. She glanced over her shoulder at the space set off by calico curtains as the kitchen and living room. It was in great disorder. On two chairs stood a washtub filled with soapsuds and clothing. The remains of breakfast lay on a clothless pine table, a skillet on the stove, and a pile of soiled linen on the floor.

"I'm washing," she said in huskily sweet voice; "but if you don't mind—"

"I don't," replied the visitor.

Drawing the folds of her chiffon velvet frock about her slender figure, Mrs. Druce stepped into the little room, while her black eyes studied the girl's amazing beauty. Mittie lifted the tub from the chairs, wiped one of them with the skirt of her faded dress, offered it to her visitor, and then seated herself on the other. She was pain-

fully aware that Mrs. Druce's curious eyes were taking in all the details of her surroundings, and she felt sick with shame.

"I see you take other people's washing besides your own," said the lady from the big hotel.

"Yes, when I get it to do. Most of the people in Roan City prefer to hire negroes."

"Don't you loathe it?"

"Yes!" cried Mittie, her tragic eyes avoiding her interrogator's.

"You remember me, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! You are the lady from the big hotel on the mountain. Did you come to see me about washing?"

"No."

Agatha Druce pulled off her gloves, took a cigarette from a case that dangled beside a vanity on her wrist, and lighted it. Mittie wished heartily that the dividing curtains had not been drawn aside, for the visitor could see her crude dressing table made of pine boxes, her cot, and the board shelf where her few treasures were—the books that gave her her only insight into life. How Mrs. Druce must contrast this place with her elegant apartments at the hotel!

"You have several rooms in the car?" the visitor asked.

"Yes, three—this one, a bedroom for grandpa, and one for me."

"Where do you get your water?"

"When it rains, from the barrel outside. When it doesn't rain, from the well by the depot."

"You *carry* it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What an awful way to live!"

"It's—it's not very nice."

"You know—" Agatha Druce's eyes, glistening with suppressed excitement, studied the girl's lovely face —"I've been thinking about you ever since we had that talk on the mountain. When you told me why you were crying, I fancied that you exaggerated; but now I know that you didn't. It's unbelievable that a beautiful young girl should live in a place like this, and wash clothes for a living!"

Mittie's hands—delicate little hands with tapering fingers, despite her labor —gripped tightly together; but she did not answer.

"Isn't there something else you could do? Couldn't you clerk in a shop? There are several in Roan City or—"

"I tried *everything,* but they won't have me."

"Then why don't you go away from here?"

"How can I? I haven't any money; and I couldn't leave grandpa. He's old and not very well. There's a man who wants to marry me"—the young voice grew bitter—"a friend of grandpa's, but I hate him worse than I do this place. Some day I'll probably stop fighting against him, and marry him."

"I can imagine that you would dislike any friend of your grandfather's. You'd be stepping from one squalid environment to another, if you married him."

"No!" Mittie shook her head. "He's a rich man, the richest in Roan City; but he's old, and there's something about him that makes my flesh crawl. I shouldn't feel that way, for he's always been kind to me, and he's the only friend grandpa has had since the fire. Maybe the very fact that he's grandpa's friend—you see what grandpa is now—makes me fear him. I can't see why he wants to marry me."

"I CAN," Agatha answered frankly. "You are beautiful, and I think you are intelligent. A man who was assured of his social position

might easily be tempted to defy public opinion and marry you. I should think his money might compensate you for his age."

"It isn't his age." Mittie's eyes half closed. "I know he's the only person who will ever want me; but I can't help hoping that some day—"

She paused.

"Romance might come," Agatha supplemented, smiling—not a pretty smile, but a hard, bitter, cynical one.

"Yes, ma'am."

"My dear child, *King Cophetua* and the beggar maid were characters in a fairy tale. *Cinderellas* don't exist in real life. Romance could touch your shoulder and never see you in this box car and that dress. To-day men rarely look below the surface. You are a squatter girl, and only one person in a million would see your beauty."

"So *he* says"—Mittie's red lips quivered—"and it isn't fair."

"I've thought so much about you," Mrs. Druce continued, "that I feel as if I could help you. Will you let me?"

"How?"

"There are many ways. Rich women often make *protégées* of girls with good voices or other talents. You may not have talent, but your beauty is too precious to be wasted here. I am a rich woman. Have you ever been to the Summit House?"

Mittie smiled in spite of her embarrassment. What would she be doing at the Summit House, the great fashionable hotel on the top of Roan Mountain, where the luxurious idlers of the east came to play golf and hunt in the winter?

"No," she said quietly.

"How well are you known in Roan City?"

"I've lived here all my life—that is, as long as I can remember."

"But this is at least two miles from town. Do you go there often?"

"No, not now. I went to school until—until I discovered why none of the children would play with me. Sometimes I go to the store, or to deliver washing; but no oftener than I can help."

"There isn't a chance in a thousand that the guests at the Summit House will ever meet any one in Roan City who knows you. I doubt if there will be any risk at all."

"I don't understand," said Mittie, her eyes, wide and wondering, looking into the slightly cynical black ones.

"My dear"—Agatha Druce laid one bejeweled and carefully manicured hand on Mittie's knee—"I'm going to change your identity. I'm going to take you to the hotel with me, introduce you to some of my friends, teach you deportment—how to play the lady—and give you an opportunity to make a suitable marriage."

The color receded from Mittie's cheeks. Her chin trembled, and her wistful mouth quivered.

"But—but," she stammered, "I have no clothes or—"

"I'll get them for you. You won't need many—a sport skirt or two, some sweaters, two evening gowns, some hats, and a coat. I think anything that will fit me will fit you. Oh, I have it all planned! I shall go to Asheville and have a shopping orgy. Then I'll send a trunk with your wardrobe from Asheville to the Summit House and address a telegram to myself, asking me to reserve a suite of rooms for you. I'm going to play fairy godmother, and what a kick I shall have doing it! You'll be a sensation—*Cinderella* up-to-date. Afterward, when you have won their hearts, we will tell them the truth. Then it won't matter in the

least, for they will know that you are lovely. Your antecedents won't count. What do you think of the idea?"

"You mean"—Mittie choked—"you want to take me up there and introduce me as your friend? Pretend that I'm a rich lady?"

"I am your friend," Mrs. Druce corrected.

"Not let any one know that I'm a squatter who has lived in this box car for years?"

"That's it. You are lovely. In smart gowns, with a name that sounds aristocratic, if you are half as clever as I think you are, you'll surely win a rich husband."

"I'm not sure," Mittie said slowly, "that I want a rich husband. I'm ignorant, and I've never worn a pretty dress in my life. I don't think I could do it."

"And I think you can," the other persisted in a manner that puzzled Mittie, innocent as she was. "You use very good English. I like your British accent. It gave me the idea in the first place. I have a little acquaintance whom I met abroad—Lady Marjorie Page. I expected her in New York this summer, but she didn't come. I think you shall impersonate her. No one here knows her. Yes, for the present you shall become Lady Marjorie Page. I've a whole week to coach you, and we can do a lot in a week."

"A week?"

"Yes. My friends arrive in a week." For a moment Mrs. Druce's eyes shifted from the girl's candid gaze. "It's settled, isn't it? I'll call for you in the morning."

MITTIE rose. She was a trifle unsteady. Such a proposition, coming from a stranger whom she had seen but once before, astounded her. She was not suspicious, but all her life she had been used to meeting snubs and rebuffs, and it seemed incredible that this lady, the best dressed woman she had ever seen, should ask her to become a friend and confidante.

"Mrs. Druce," she said, with a quaint dignity that possessed much charm, "why are you doing this for me?"

"Does it matter, if I wish to do it?"

"Yes. I can't quite understand it."

"My dear, one gets tired of the same persons, the same things, day in and day out. Say that I wish to play a practical joke on an insufferable snob—say that I want to be charitable and do a kind deed—"

"A practical joke!" Mittie interrupted. "Is that it?"

Mrs. Druce's tawny skin grew a shade darker.

"Yes, in a way," she admitted. "One of my friends—a very dear one, for all his faults—comes to the Summit House next week. He adores titles. He has everything in the world—good looks, money, charm, everything except a high social position. I mean"—she hesitated, as if weighing her words—"a social position as high as he wishes to obtain. There are degrees of social standing, and some doors are closed to divorcées and self-made men. I am the former; my friend, Mr. Armitage, is the latter. He has often joked about it. He has said that if he ever married, it would be to a woman of title, who would open the portals of any society. Do you understand?"

Mittie, who knew the bitter hurt of unrequited love, had a feeling that the man of whom her visitor spoke must be a great deal more to the dark-eyed woman than a mere friend. She still did not comprehend why Mrs. Druce desired the masquerade.

"All snobs," Mrs. Druce continued, her voice growing hard, "are mad about titles. Hal—er—my friend is no exception. When he sees you, he'll give you a real rush. Afterward, when the joke is on him, and his pride has been shaken somewhat, he will appreciate the lesson I have taught him."

How was Mittie to know that revenge was the motive behind Agatha Druce's professed altruism? That no kindly feeling had prompted her to make the offer, no desire to teach Hal Armitage a salutary lesson, but a cruel wish to see him bowed with shame after he had fallen in love with a girl whose name was a byword in her community? Only that morning she had received a letter from the man she loved, telling her that he would never marry a woman who was not above him in social status. Knowing him, she was certain that he would, as she termed it, give the supposed Lady Marjorie a "rush." He would unquestionably ask the girl to marry him. Once the engagement was announced, Mittie's part would be over. She could return to her squalid life in the box car, and Armitage's humiliation would be complete.

"You—you want your friend to fall in love with me?" Mittie stammered, her cheeks crimson. "Then you'll tell him who I am? Would that be quite honest?"

Agatha Druce laughed.

"I don't worry about his heart, for he hasn't any, and such pride as he possesses needs a fall. Think of yourself, not of him. I shan't ask you to do anything wrong, believe me. I want to help you. While position and name are paramount with him, there are other men who admire sterling qualities and beauty more. Is it settled?"

Still Mittie hesitated. She was too bewildered to comprehend all that Mrs. Druce outlined, but the persuasive voice was winning her when old Asa Blaine, impatient and curious over the meaning of the well dressed stranger's visit, came into the kitchen.

"Grandpa, this lady—Mrs. Druce—wants me to go to the Summit House with her."

"What for?" inquired Asa, suspicion lurking in his bloodshot blue eyes.

Agatha coughed.

"I—I left my maid in New York, Mr. Blaine, and I find that I am lost without her. I have just offered your granddaughter the position."

"Mittie doesn't know anything about service," objected Asa.

"I can teach her all that is necessary. The wages are good—more than she earns here, I think."

"Do you want to go, Mittie?"

"Yes, grandpa."

"Suit yourself."

"You don't mind if I do? It will only be for a few weeks."

"No, I don't mind."

The old man crossed to a shelf over one window and took down a bottle. Then he disappeared behind the curtains.

"Will he bother you at the hotel?" Mrs. Druce asked anxiously. "We can't have him coming up there to ruin our plans."

"He won't. Grandpa never climbs the mountains. He's too old. Besides, he hates the forest since the big fire."

CHAPTER II

LEONARD LALOCK

AFTER Mrs. Druce departed, leaving behind her a faint scent of imported perfume and expensive cigarettes, Mittie sat motionless for a

while. The vista that Agatha's words had opened to her was so amazing that she was completely stunned. Never in her wildest daydreams, when filled with loathing for her surroundings, disgusted with her grandfather's vice, and heartsick over what the future offered, had she dared hope for anything like this.

A week ago, when she had almost been ready to fling herself into a rocky chasm and end her hopeless existence, she had felt the first bitter pangs of jealousy, and had realized that love for a man whom she would never meet had been added as another torment to her misery. Now she was to have an opportunity to meet him as an equal, to mingle with his companions, to be beautifully gowned—a lady. She might attract his attention and possibly—oh, God, make it possible!—win his love.

But if she did win his love, and he learned the truth about her, wouldn't he turn from her with loathing? Oh, she wouldn't think of that! She must grasp what the gods offered, she must accept it without question.

If he found her lovely in borrowed finery and under a borrowed name, she was still Mittie Blaine, and the things he might learn to cherish were her own. She would have the glory of her curls, her velvet smooth skin, her perfect features—and she *was* intelligent. She knew it.

Only intelligence could have given her the capacity to understand the printed pages of the books which were her one solace; for no one had taught her their meaning. Intelligence made her crave the worth-while things that she had never possessed. It gave her an appreciation of beauty—the amber, amethyst, and orange sunsets on the Appalachians; the burned umber, crimson, and gold of the autumn leaves; the delicate shades of the spring flowers; the song of the birds, the mournful whisper of the wind chanting through the fir trees, the majesty of distant Blood Mountain when mantled with snow.

Once, when she was still in school, Lalock had brought her a box of paints, with brushes and paper, and she had made sketches of Roan Mountain and the valley below. Lalock had been amazed when he saw them, and had told her that some day he would send her to an art school in the East; but he had forgotten his promise when he decided that he wanted to marry her.

Presently she rose and bent over the washtub. Her luminous eyes, filled with dreams, did not see the garments she rubbed in the soapy water. Her parted lips, full and sweetly petulant, held a hint of a smile. With the muscles of her arms and shoulders rippling under the white satin of her skin, her forehead moist with perspiration, and the tendrils of copper hair clinging in ringlets about her temples, she was a picture of beautiful domesticity to the man who stepped noiselessly upon the platform and stared at her through the open door.

HE was a tall, lean man, with sparse mouse-colored hair, slightly grayed. He had slate-gray eyes, a long, slender nose, thin, bloodless lips, and small, pointed ears that stood out a trifle from a narrow but rather well-shaped head. Faultlessly groomed in a riding habit, he was as incongruous there as Agatha had been in her fox furs and velvet.

For a moment he watched Mittie in silence. Then the girl, feeling the intensity of his gaze, raised her eyes.

"Mr. Lalock!" she stammered.

"Asa said you were inside. I see you're busy."

"Yes, sir, I'm very busy, and I can't offer you a chair."

He laughed.

"Nor would you wish to if you could. I wonder why you dislike me so much, Mittie!"

"I don't know," she replied frankly.

His long upper lip drew back with a grimace of chagrin.

"You are honest, at least. I've always been kind to you. I've been the only friend you and your grandfather have had all these years."

"Perhaps grandpa would have been better off without your friendship," she retorted, coloring at her own daring.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I can't explain exactly. I only know that grandpa always drinks more after you visit him, and is cross and ugly. Sometimes I don't believe you *are* his friend."

"No?" Lalock hit the toe of his boot with his riding crop. "That's a strange thing to say."

"Oh, I know you stood by him after the forest fire, and I know you prevented the authorities from taking this place away from us; but why have you bothered with us? You're the most prominent man in Roan City—respected, looked up to. Grandpa is the most disreputable one. And why does he fear you so, if you're his friend?"

"Fear me! What a ridiculous statement!"

"You could influence him to do anything. Why haven't you tried to keep him away from liquor and make a man of him?"

"Perhaps"—Lalock narrowed his eyes until their expression was lost—"I've too much pity for him to rob him of the one thing that quiets his conscience. Remorse ruined his life, my child. I could not rebuild it, much as I've tried."

"Remorse! It wasn't his fault the forest burned."

"They say it was."

"Do *you* believe it was?" inquired Mittie, her candid eyes meeting Lalock's unflinchingly.

"I am reasonably certain that Asa was drunk that day," he replied.

She gave a sharp cry, and for a moment she balanced herself against the tub. Then she flung at him:

"If you believe *that*, how can you be his friend? You lost your wife in that fire. I should think you would hate him!"

LEANING against the table, Lalock regarded the girl with the enigmatical smile that she disliked so much.

"My dear child," he said, "your grandfather saved my life once, and I could not bear malice for an unintentional wrong."

"Saved your life?" she breathed.

"He never told you?"

"Never. He never tells me anything about himself or you. All I know is what I see. You knew him before he came to Roan City?"

"Yes. Asa and I went to Oxford together."

"Oxford! You and grandpa! He is much older than you—I can't believe it."

He seemed to enjoy her amazement.

"There is five years' difference in our ages, that is all. I was a freshman, he was in his last year, but we were friends." He spoke slowly, as if trying to recall the distant past. "His name wasn't Blaine in those days. It was Gordon — Adam Gordon. Curiously, it was a fire from which he

saved me—a fire in the college buildings. My room was in flames, and I was caught like a rat in a trap. Asa knew I was there, and to rescue me he rushed through the fire and smoke at the risk of his own life—just as he rescued you."

"I never knew," she whispered. "Then he—he *was* a gentleman?"

Lalock nodded.

"Quite so—a poor one, I understood, but a gentleman. Later—"

"But that was in England, wasn't it?" Mittie asked eagerly. "Isn't Oxford in England?"

"Yes. Oh, you knew that?"

"I've read about it somewhere," she said, flushing. "What brought him here, so far away?"

"I fancy I did. Your grandfather was born a gentleman, my dear, but he fell into bad company. He got into difficulties with the law that finally landed him in Dartmoor—a prison."

"Oh!"

"He escaped, I don't exactly know how, and came to America. We had carried on a desultory correspondence all these years, and he hunted me up. I secured the position as forest guard at Roan Top for him, and we have remained friends."

Mittie was trembling.

"You mean that grandpa was a—a convict when he came here?"

"Just so."

"I—I can't believe it!" she choked. "He's a drunkard, and lazy, but he's honest. Oh, I know he's honest! He has always preached honesty and goodness to me, and he seems ashamed to be what he is. I can't believe it!"

"Perhaps he has realized that honesty pays," Lalock said dryly. "Knowing this, my dear, don't you think you're very unwise to refuse my offer of marriage?"

"You can't want me for your wife!" she cried.

"But I do. I've known all this for years, and it hasn't mattered, has it? But it would matter very much to others if they knew. You haven't a chance, child, to make anything of yourself except through me. You've discovered that, haven't you, when you've tried to find employment? As my wife, everything would be different. Mittie"—he placed a long, sallow hand on her bare shoulder—"Mittie, you could overcome your dislike for me, if you tried. You could learn to love me, if you would let me teach you."

"No!" she replied, shuddering. "No, I couldn't!"

"I can give you everything in the world—a beautiful home, servants, jewels—"

"I want love," she whispered.

His fingers felt like talons of steel in her flesh. Mentally she writhed at their contact.

"I love you!" he breathed, bringing his face closer until his lips all but touched her hair. "I love you! Long ago I resolved to marry you—first because I pitied you, and then because I wanted you—your youth, your beauty, the fragrance of you, your keen, undeveloped mind. I love you, Mittie!"

"BUT I want to love the man I marry," she said slowly, staring straight ahead through the open door. "I don't want money or servants or jewels. I never could love you."

The man gave a rasping laugh and swept her into his arms. In spite of her struggles and sobs of protest, he fastened his hungry mouth on her fresh red lips and kissed her again and again, with a passion that revolted her.

"Nevertheless, my pretty child," he chuckled, still keeping her pinioned in his embrace, "you're going to be my wife. I've never wanted anything I didn't get. You'll marry me!"

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" she sobbed.

"Asa will tell you to do as I say," Lalock continued. "He's had a taste of freedom all these years, and he wouldn't care to spend his old age in a cell."

"You wouldn't dare!" she cried defiantly.

"Wouldn't I? If Roan City knew that the man responsible for the forest fire was an escaped convict, all the old scandal would be revived, and within twenty-four hours there's be a mob here to lynch him. Think of that, my dear!"

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "Oh, God!"

The girl's body sagged as the pitiful wail escaped her.

"Let her alone, Lalock!" Old Asa, who had been a silent witness behind the calico curtains for several minutes, drew them aside and stepped into the kitchen. "I told you, if Mittie consented to marry you, well and good, but I wouldn't drive her to it. Let her go!"

Lalock's arms dropped to his sides. With a sob the girl sank down upon the pile of clothing on the floor. The two men — one in the prime of life, well groomed, well fed, the other a wreck of what had once been a gentleman, unshaven, shabby, hollow cheeked, blear-eyed—faced each other; and the air crackled with their antagonism.

"I heard you threaten to expose my past," Asa went on, with a dignity ill suited to his appearance. "I wouldn't try to make that threat good. It might prove a boomerang."

Lalock laughed discordantly.

"The rôle of hero ill becomes you, Blaine," he said theatrically. "Next you'll be showing me the door, I suppose."

"I might, if you compel me."

The banker picked up his hat and riding crop. Without a backward glance he left Mittie and her grandfather alone.

Asa bent over the girl's sunny head, and patted her curls.

"Don't cry," he said. "He won't do anything. You don't have to marry him. You're going with that lady tomorrow, and he needn't know where you've gone."

"Was it—true—about the prison?" she asked, surprised at the old man's unusual display of tenderness.

"Yes, it was true."

"Oh, grandpa!"

"I never amounted to anything," he said bitterly. "I've always been rotten to the core. Don't waste any tears on me."

He reached into his pocket for his bottle again.

"Oh, grandpa!" she repeated. "If they knew, they'd lynch you!"

Asa drained the last drop.

"Perhaps; but they'll never know—not from Leonard Lalock."

CHAPTER III

LADY MARJORIE PAGE

THERE was still dew on the grass, and the sun was just peeping over the mountain, when Mittie, standing in the doorway of the box car, saw Mrs. Druce alight from her sedan beside the railroad tracks.

The girl had slept little during the night. Lalock's revelation had disturbed her greatly. Despite her grandfather's assurance that the banker

would do nothing to injure him, she was afraid that if she disappeared Lalock would carry out his threat, and a terrible fate would befall the old man.

"Let her alone!" Mittie, struggling in Lalock's arms, heard her grandfather's voice

Together with this fear was her desire to lead her own life as she chose, and to grasp at the chance for betterment that Agatha Druce offered. Such an opportunity would never come to her twice. Yet it is doubtful if even Agatha, with all her vigorous and dominating reasoning, could have induced Mittie to leave the box car if she had not entertained the hope of meeting the man she loved.

Mrs. Druce carried a suitcase with her. Mittie met her below the steps and took it from her.

"This is yours," said the lady from the hotel. "I've engaged a room for you, and I had a trunk sent from Asheville yesterday. There are some things in this—lingerie and a traveling dress. I want you to put them on."

At any other time the soft silken underthings and the dress that the visitor displayed for her approval would have filled Mittie with delight; but this morning she was too much torn with the turmoil within her to do more than murmur:

"They are pretty, very pretty!"

Mrs. Druce nodded.

"That's right! Always suppress your feelings. It's the first requisite of a lady—suppression."

The gown of dark blue silk, sprigged with tiny yellow roses, fitted miraculously, since Agatha had modeled it. The sport coat of gray tweed with a fox collar and the gray felt hat were also highly becoming.

"When your hair is bobbed," Mrs. Druce said, "I defy any one to recognize you." She glanced outside the window at Asa, who was sawing wood. "I do hope he'll stay away from the hotel. He would ruin everything if he followed you."

"He won't. I told you that nothing would induce him to go up the mountain," the girl replied.

Mittie had never ridden to Roan City before, nor had she been in an automobile. The two-mile drive, with its new thrills, not unmixed with panic, the feeling that she was properly clothed and was embarking upon a strange adventure, did much to banish her fear of Lalock. There was magic in the silken underwear that clung to her body, magic in the folds of the new gown, in the coat, shoes, hat, and gloves—a magic that made it easy for her to assume the rôle she was to play.

With the casting aside of the box car and the patched calico dress, Mittie doffed her old personality. As Agatha, driving leisurely through the little city, explained what was expected of her, it seemed to the excited girl that her past had been a bad dream, and that she had just returned to reality.

At a beauty parlor her head was shorn of its mass of curls, and a fashionable shingle was substituted. Her finger nails were manicured, and a touch of rouge was added to her soft cheeks. Then Mrs. Druce, well satisfied that the change in the girl was so great that recognition would be impossible, started for the Summit House.

"THE less you have to say the better," Agatha said. "A good listener is always popular; but you must be able to converse on some subjects. Of course, you will have to know a good deal about England. Your home is in London. Luckily I've spent some time there, and can teach you all that is necessary. I have a very good book about England, which you must read at once. There's another book about the various operas and their composers. You must read that, for, of course, you adore opera. You've visited France and Italy when a child, but you don't recall them. You don't ride. You had a fall several years ago, and have feared horses ever since. You are not athletic, you neither play tennis nor golf—it would be impossible to learn them in so short a time. Your father is Earl Page, and your mother was the Hon. Diana Ellis. She's dead now."

Agatha rattled on.

"In New York you live at the Plaza, on Fifty-Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue. You came over on the Mauretania in October. You had a very rough passage, and were ill during the whole voyage. You are still tired from your journey, and so"— Agatha smiled— "you'll have luncheon and dinner in your room to-day, and no one will see

you until you are a little more accustomed to being Lady Marjorie. Do you think you can remember all that I've told you?"

"I can try," Mittie said. "I've a good memory."

The sedan entered the pillared gate of the driveway and drove through an opening in the hedge of clipped fir trees to the front entrance of the hotel. A liveried doorman sprang down the veranda steps, opened the door, and assisted Mrs. Druce and the awed Mittie out of the machine. A bell boy snatched up the suitcase.

Agatha linked her arm in Mittie's, and drew her briskly across the tiled floor of the lobby to the reception desk.

"I'll register for Lady Marjorie," she said to the clerk in a clear voice. "Is her suite ready?"

"Yes, Mrs. Druce—the one next to yours."

Mittie's heart was pounding as she entered the elevator. The throbbing in her ears was like the roar of mighty waters. She had been too timid, too much overawed by the strangeness and luxury of the lobby, to dare to look about; but she was sure that if *he* had been present, she would have known it. She would have felt his magnetism.

By the time the bell boy ushered her into the orchid and ivory suite that was to be hers, her knees were like jelly, and something very close to hysteria made her burst into a gurgle of laughter.

"Marjorie!" gasped Agatha. "What is it?"

Her glance held the girl's as she tipped the boy and almost pushed him out of the room.

"It's all so funny!" Mittie collapsed in an armchair. "I'm so scared and excited, I feel like laughing and crying at the same time!"

"You don't know how funny it is," Agatha answered cryptically. "I hope to have a good laugh myself at the climax, but just now we'd both best be serious."

SHE brought the remainder of Mittie's new wardrobe from her room, and for an hour helped the girl in and out of the garments, all the while giving her instructions upon behavior. Both in negligee, they had luncheon in Mrs. Druce's sitting room, and afterward, in rhythm to music furnished by the radio, Agatha showed her her first dance step. Mittie was an instinctively graceful dancer.

The lesson was interrupted by the telephone ringing. Mrs. Druce took down the receiver.

"Hello, sis!" Mittie heard a masculine voice come over the wire. "Did her ladyship arrive?"

"She did," Agatha answered.

Mittie moved uneasily. The conversation was not for her ears, but the telephone was so clear that she could hear every word.

"I'm at Cecily's now. She told me to inform you that there wasn't a chance for you to engage me as escort for her ladyship, as she had me all tied up herself."

"Oh, Ronnie, I'm so glad! It's settled, then?"

"Rather!"

"And you tell Cecily that I hadn't counted on you for the grand rush. Hal Armitage will be here next week. He adores titles, and if he doesn't offer to beau my little friend while she's here I shall be much disappointed."

"Just thought I'd let you know how things stood between us. By the way, Cecily is dining with us to-night."

"Splendid! Give her my love. Good-by!"

Mittie wondered at the expression of relief on her hostess's face when she hung up the receiver. Certainly nothing in the conversation should have caused it.

"My brother, Ronald Standish," Mrs. Druce said. "You will meet him later, of course, but you aren't ready for it yet. Besides, I wouldn't expose you to the lynx eyes of his *fiancée* tonight. She is very jealous, and might see through you. No flirtations with Ronnie!" She laughed. "I'll say you have a headache."

"I really have," replied Mittie with a wan smile.

"I'll order some dinner for you, and you can go to bed early."

She showed Mittie how to summon a waiter by telephoning for room service, gave her some money to pay the bill, and then sent her back to her room; but the girl was too much excited to eat, or to relax. She wrote down the various injunctions she had received on some paper that she found in a writing desk. She glanced over the books Agatha had instructed her to read. There were maps in one of them, showing New York and London.

Then she wandered through her rooms. The bathroom with its shower intrigued her, and so did the low satin-covered bed in the room adjoining. With tingling fingers that had never felt luxury before, she touched the smooth polish of the lackered dresser and chairs, and the velvet-upholstered furnishings in the small sitting room.

Agatha had forgotten nothing for a lady of quality, even to a bottle of French perfume. Like a small child with a new toy, Mittie played with the bewildering toilet articles—the enameled brushes and comb, the hand mirror. She had never seen such a mirror before. She had had to be satisfied with a broken piece of looking-glass that Asa had rescued from a rubbish heap.

She dusted her cheeks with powder, tried her new lip stick, touched her hair with a drop of the perfume, and pirouetted before the cheval glass—feeling as if the girl she saw reflected there was a stranger. The graceful figure in a billow of sea-green chiffon and lace, with short, smooth hair lying in close undulations of coppery gold, couldn't be herself. The vivid red lips, the luminous eyes, the features, all seemed so different.

She was no longer Mittie Blaine. She was Lady Marjorie Page.

Agatha had proved a fairy godmother indeed. Her wand had accomplished this miracle. The little scullery maid who had been transformed into a princess had undergone no greater change than Mittie Blaine, squatter girl, when she adopted the name of the titled lady who lived far-away in England.

SHADOWS began to creep into the room, and a soft gray haze obscured the birch and cedar and pine trees that surrounded the hotel. The shadows lengthened, darkened, and filled the apartment.

Mittie, with no knowledge of electricity, tried in vain to light the lamps. Through the French windows, opening upon a balcony, she saw the reflection of light from Mrs. Druce's apartment adjoining. She hesitated to go into the hall in a negligee, or to ask assistance of any one but her hostess; so she pushed open a window and stepped outside. There were similar windows in Agatha's living room.

Cautiously, a little fearful of the height, Mittie crossed the space that separated the windows, and tapped on

Agatha's. There was no response, though through the glass she could see the room in the mellow glow of shaded lamps.

She waited a moment and then tapped again. Still no answer. Agatha was probably in her bedroom. When she came into the living room, Mittie might be able to attract her attention.

The night was chilly, with a brisk wind blowing through the fir trees, but the sky overhead was dotted with stars, and in the east a newly risen moon glowed like a huge opal. The mystery of those scintillating bodies always intrigued the girl. With an ecstatic sigh at the beauty of her world, she leaned on the balustrade and gazed upward, conscious that her fragile and filmy garment was an inadequate covering.

At that moment a young man closed his window behind him and stepped out upon the balcony for a breath of pine-scented air before descending to the close, overheated dining room below. He was slender, tall, and dark-haired, and wore a well fitting dinner coat. Several doors away, directly beside his sister's window, he saw a small figure, half lost in the shadows. Certain that it was Agatha, he skirted the short distance and greeted her.

"Hello, sis! Cecily is—"

Mittie turned. With his realization that he had accosted a stranger came her recognition of him. The man she loved! *Prince Charming* to her *Cinderella!*

Her blood rushed to her head, there was a roaring in her ears, and the balcony seemed to rock under her. In an agony compounded of panic, delight, and embarrassment, her hand fluttered up to her throat and lay there against a pulse which beat so hard that it choked her.

"I beg your pardon," gasped the young man. He saw the girl's embarrassment, and attributed it to the negligee she was wearing. "You were just outside my sister's window, and I thought you were she."

"You're—Mrs. Druce's *brother?*" Mittie inquired in an awed whisper.

"Yes! And you—I'll wager you're Lady Marjorie Page, aren't you?" He laughed. "Agatha said I wasn't to meet you until to-morrow, but I stole a march on her, didn't I? That's a first-rate joke! I'm Ronald Standish. Perhaps Agatha has spoken of me."

"Yes," Mittie breathed.

"Agatha has told me a great deal about you, and I feel as if I knew you already. You and Agatha met on the Berengaria, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"How nice that you've come to Roan City! The town isn't much—just a handful of people and a few shops. I think it was once a lumber camp; but this hotel is pretty fair, and there's good sport here—as good hunting as you'll find in the Carolinas, a splendid golf course—I suppose you are a fine shot?" he interrupted himself.

"No," Mittie answered. She was uncertain just what he meant, but felt that she would be safer in disclaiming all accomplishments.

Her brother—Agatha's brother, and she was talking to him! It couldn't be true!

"I'll lay a wager you are," Ronnie laughed. "English girls always go in for hunting. I say"—as Mittie shivered—"aren't you cold out here?"

"Yes," she answered. "I was waiting for Mrs.—for Agatha."

HE knocked loudly on the window. "She's probably gone down to the dining room. We've guests to-night."

"Oh!" Mittie gasped.

"Anything wrong?"

"I—I can't turn on the light."

He laughed merrily.

"Not used to our new-fangled conveniences? I suppose you live in an old mansion without electricity, and your father would spurn anything more modern than candles. Is this your room?"

"Yes."

He pushed open one of the French windows, crossed the floor, and pressed a button. Light flooded the room.

As Mittie followed him, he turned and gave an involuntary ejaculation of admiration.

"Good Lord, but you're beautiful! Agatha said you were attractive, but—why, you're the loveliest thing I ever laid eyes on!"

The deep blush on Mittie's cheeks and her downcast eyes found an answering embarrassment in his.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You startled me. Please don't mind my saying that."

"I—I don't mind."

Mind! If the gods had suddenly offered her all the jewels of the universe, Mittie could not have been happier. She was quivering so violently that she felt sure he must see her draperies tremble. She wanted him to leave her, lest her self-control should wholly give way; and yet she wanted him to stay—to stay with her always.

"You're chilled through," he said with sudden contrition. "I can see you're shaking. Please sit down! Let me get you a coat. You shouldn't have gone outside in that wind."

He placed his hands on her shoulders and gently pushed her into an armchair. The touch of his warm hands on her shoulders, bare but for the transparent chiffon, was like an electric battery charged full in her veins. Every nerve tingled with the exquisite pain that made her senses reel. Terrified, ecstatic, her eyes met his.

The young man drew a deep breath. His own cheeks had crimsoned under their wholesome tan.

"You've a coat in there?" he stammered, indicating an open door.

Mittie nodded. Speech was impossible.

He left her for a moment, then returned with the sport coat that Agatha had purchased the day before, and gently placed it about her shoulders.

"Are you coming down to dinner soon?" he asked, his voice a little strained.

"No. I'll have dinner here."

"Then I'll run along." He crossed to the door. "I'll see you to-morrow, I hope—and every day." She smiled. "And," he added, with his hand on the knob, "I do hope you don't catch cold!"

"I won't."

As the door closed behind him, she dropped her head on the arm of the chair and burst into tears—not because she was unhappy, but because the miracle was almost more beautiful than she could endure.

CHAPTER IV

THE MASQUERADE BEGINS

RONALD had not got over his surprise when he entered the long, brilliantly lighted dining room and approached the table where Agatha sat between a thin, flaxen-haired girl and a gray-haired, white-mustached old gentleman.

He could not understand why his sister had so nonchalantly dismissed Lady Marjorie with "Oh, she's attractive." The girl was not only beauti-

ful—she was facially perfect, with a wistful charm and an expression that indicated brains. She was modest, too, which was unusual in this day and age. How she had blushed!

Good Lord, he hadn't seen a girl blush for years. He doubted seriously if Cecily, for all her milk-white skin, ever blushed.

Feeling a little guilty at his disloyal thought, he dropped into a chair beside Cecily Howard, and apologized for being late. He had no intention of mentioning his meeting with Lady Marjorie. Cecily was notoriously jealous. She would have good cause for a display of petulance if she learned why he had kept her waiting, when only that afternoon they had entered into a definite engagement. True, they had done so in a more or less bantering fashion, but both recognized it as a serious bond.

Ronald was not altogether certain that he was in love with the blond girl beside him, but a chap had to marry some time. He and Cecily were great pals. Agatha was keen on the idea, and so was Colonel Howard. Cecily was everything that Ronald wanted in a wife—fairly clever, always well dressed, an expert dancer, a good tennis and golf player. She came of a fine family; she was a handsome girl, and unusually sweet-tempered; and if there was no ardent love between them, they certainly liked each other. Between them they would have a nice income, and at Colonel Howard's death Cecily would inherit a fortune.

Not that money mattered. Ronald's position with the brokerage house on Broad Street was assured, and he was likely to go far. His own inheritance from his father had made it unnecessary for him to work, but he believed every man should have a career.

Some day he would buy a seat on the Exchange. They could travel for a time after their marriage, and Cecily would grace a home with beautiful dignity when they were ready to settle down. Yes, Cecily was the wife for him.

But somehow, to-night, Cecily's pale gold hair lacked luster, and her eyes were not so warm or so blue. Her skin was too white and her body too thin.

Only one girl in a million was really beautiful; and Ronald had just seen that one in a million.

DURING the next three days Mittie was practically a prisoner in the orchid and ivory suite. Agatha, with a feverish intensity that almost had a touch of madness, continued her lessons; and Ronald Standish tried in vain to get another glimpse of the girl who had intrigued him.

On Sunday morning Agatha saw her brother, with his golf bag slung over his shoulder, get into a sport car. Cecily Howard was driving. Agatha drew a sigh of relief. Ronald was going to Asheville for a golf tournament, and would be away for two days. Now was her opportunity to test Mittie's poise and intelligence.

In a yellow sport sweater and hat to match, Mittie lunched with the widow on the wide veranda, and quietly, with scarcely a change of color, acknowledged introductions to people whom Agatha knew.

That same night, a radiant vision in an evening gown scintillating with crystals, the cynosure of all eyes, she dined in the hotel restaurant. When a fatuous youth, whose only distinction was a wealthy parent, begged her to dance, she timidly obeyed Agatha's smile, and slipped into his arms.

"English women are rarely good dancers you know," Agatha said, banteringly, paving the way in case Mittie made mistakes. "I hope Lady Marjorie is better than most!"

But the youth dancing with Mittie was more awed in the presence of a titled partner than Mittie was at her first appearance on a dancing floor. Agatha had no occasion to worry.

Mittie wondered when Agatha did not mention her brother. The girl concluded that he had said nothing about their meeting, and decided that it would be wiser for her to do the same thing. Something warned her that Agatha would not approve of a friendship between them, however kind she was about any one else.

RONALD returned on Monday evening, and Agatha informed Mittie that she would meet him at dinner. He was waiting for them in the hotel lobby as they alighted from the elevator, and if Agatha had seen the admiration that leaped to his eyes when they rested upon her companion she would probably have sent the girl packing; but she happened to be looking in another direction. In consequence, she missed both Ronald's expression and the recognition that flashed between the two young people.

"My brother Ronald Standish, Lady Marjorie," Agatha said casually.

Ronald bowed and smiled, and Mittie smiled back. They went into the dining room. There, triumphantly certain that her brother had not detected any deception in her *protégée*, secure in her belief that he was too much in love with Cecily Howard to be susceptible to the charms of another girl, Agatha beamed between them.

Every evening, during the dinner hour, the orchestra played dance music. To-night, at the first strain of a fox trot, Ronald rose and held out his arms to Mittie, with a look on his face which his *fiancée* would have had every right to resent.

Mittie's cheeks flamed scarlet. Under her lowered lids she glanced at Mrs. Druce. Ronald's sister nodded assent, so she rose, trembling slightly, and slipped into his embrace. For half a second they stood motionless, his face bent toward hers, his arm holding her pliant body close to his; then, slowly, they moved into the center of the floor.

Every particle of color had deserted Ronald's cheeks. Something that he could not define had electrified him. No kiss from Cecily's red lips had ever thrilled him as this contact with Mittie did. No touch of Cecily's warm hand had ever set his head swimming, or the blood pounding against his temples, as did Mittie's cold fingers in his.

His clasp tightened. Almost involuntarily he drew her slender body nearer and held her head against his breast, while his cheek rested upon her lovely hair.

"You're the most beautiful thing in the world," he whispered huskily. "The most beautiful thing in the world!"

He was too much overpowered by the new emotion to realize any treachery to the girl he had promised to marry. Totally oblivious of the many eyes following them as they glided about the floor, the dancers seemed to float upon air. Mittie was well aware of the reason for her happiness; but Ronald, who had fancied that his mild affection for Cecily Howard was as deep a love as he was capable of giving any woman, was like one in a trance.

Both were too drunk with their emotions when they returned to their table

to notice that Agatha's face was pallid, that her black eyes had a hard glitter, and that there was a livid white line about her mouth.

"Ronnie," she said, catching her brother's arm, "Hal Armitage is in the lobby. I saw him come in through those doors. Tell him we're in here, will you?"

"Armitage here *now?* He—why, I thought he wasn't due for a week or so!"

"He's here, I tell you. I saw him. Ask him to join us."

"Certainly, if you wish."

He bowed and sauntered across the floor. At the double doors he hesitated. Agatha wanted Armitage to meet Lady Marjorie! She intended Hal to play escort to the loveliest girl Ronald had ever met! Gad, why hadn't he known what Lady Marjorie was like before he asked Cecily to marry him?

Agatha leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes for a second. Then she opened her vanity, hastily rubbed some rouge on her livid cheeks, and touched her lip stick to her mouth. She was entirely in command of herself when Ronald returned with a man whose prematurely white hair was in striking contrast to his youthful, handsome features and jet-black eyebrows.

"My dear Agatha, it's so nice to see you," Armitage murmured as he took her extended hand. "I didn't dare hope that we'd meet again so soon."

Agatha smiled a slow, sleepy smile that gave no hint of the turmoil within her.

"Lady Marjorie, may I present Mr. Armitage, an old friend?" she drawled. "Lady Marjorie Page, Hal."

There was a perceptible tightening of the man's thin red lips as he acknowledged the introduction. Agatha, watching him through narrowed and jealous eyes, attributed his start to the title; but Ronald knew that the cause was the girl's beauty.

Mittie, well coached by Mrs. Druce, flashed one of her rare smiles.

"So pleased," she said in her huskily sweet voice.

NONE of the other diners, inordinately interested in the group about the table near the double glass doors, realized the undercurrent of antagonism that grew with each moment as the evening proceeded. Ronald, resenting Armitage's admiration for the pretended Lady Marjorie, found that it required an effort to appear natural. Armitage was well aware of Agatha's feelings toward him, and not a little uncertain whether she was playing a dangerous game, or had accepted his dismissal of her as a well intended gesture. Being also deeply intrigued both by Mittie's title and by the girl's charm, he responded to the younger man's resentment in kind.

Agatha, assured that her revenge was at hand, was overwhelmed with a jealousy of her *protégée* that distorted everything. She was jealous of the youth and beauty that she had purchased for so ugly a purpose. She was jealous even of the borrowed title which was to bait her trap. She hated the girl she was sponsoring—hated the copper bronze of her hair, the warm, soft tint of her skin, her perfect teeth, her sweetly curved adolescent body.

It might be the title that would tempt Armitage to offer marriage to Mittie; but as Agatha's sick eyes followed the two dancing together, her heart warned her that the lovely girl would win his love, and no revenge would compensate for the suffering that the older woman would endure if this happened.

She refused to dance with her broth-

er, pleading a headache. Ronald was not a little puzzled. Agatha had seemed anxious to bring Armitage into their party, yet she seemed to resent the fact that he was attracted to her guest. Good Lord, any man would be attracted!

Ronald had long expected that his sister and Armitage would hit it off together; but evidently there was nothing but friendship between them. What was the matter with her, anyway?

Mittie intuitively realized that something was wrong when she returned to the table and Agatha announced her intention of going to bed.

"I'm going with you," the girl said quickly, reading the command in Mrs. Druce's eyes.

"Oh, no!" Ronald remonstrated. "The night is young. Stay and dance a while!"

Mittie shook her head.

"No more to-night," she declared.

"Then let's take a stroll in the moonlight."

The eagerness in his voice did not escape his sister, and startled her. She glanced quickly from one flushed face to the other.

"Don't tease, Ron," she said sharply. "If Lady Marjorie is tired, don't urge her to stay downstairs."

"But you'll go for a canter before breakfast," the young man persisted. "They've got some good horses here, and—"

"I don't ride," Mittie answered miserably. Agatha's fingers gripping her arm told her what to say. "I'm sorry."

Armitage smiled at Ronald's chagrin.

"I'm turning in myself," he said. "The train trip was rather tiring."

At the elevator, with continental grace, Armitage pressed his lips to the hands of both women in parting. Ronald, who scorned such gestures, scowled and walked away.

Lady Marjorie had deliberately cut him! She had fallen for that suave, polished bounder! Well, he had been injudicious in paying her such extravagant compliments. He had been sincere, but probably she thought him a fool. Armitage, with his experience, would never be so gauche.

Perhaps it was just as well if he didn't see too much of her, Ronald decided. She might prove dangerous to his peace of mind. She was too attractive for a man who was engaged to be married.

CHAPTER V

A THREAT AND A PROMISE

AGATHA and Mittie walked down the long corridor in silence. Mingled with her jealousy of the girl, the older woman was in a quiver of fear for Ronald's safety. He might not be aware of it, but his infatuation for the squatter girl was obvious—just as obvious as Mittie's infatuation for him. Agatha's revenge bade fair to become a grim joke on herself.

"Come into my room," she said abruptly, as she reached her apartment.

Mittie followed her. She was torn between a desire to cry and an impulse to laugh.

"Sit down." Agatha switched on the light. "I want to talk to you."

Mittie obeyed her. The peremptory voice, the hard black eyes, frightened the girl a little.

Agatha paced the floor, thinking rapidly. Finally she whirled and demanded abruptly:

"What do you think of my brother?"

"Why—why—"

"You think he is charming, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Far more attractive than Hal Armitage?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And that you'd like to marry him?"

Mittie half rose, then sank back again. Never once had such a possibility occurred to her. She loved him, and a wonder had come into her life, just to meet him; but to marry him—

"Oh, no, no!" she half sobbed. "He would never marry me!"

"You're quite right," Agatha said dryly. "In the first place, Ronnie is engaged to a charming girl in his own set. In the second place, if he knew what you were, he'd probably never speak to you again. Ronnie is proud. Most certainly, if he knew you were masquerading under another woman's title, he would despise you."

The color fled from Mittie's cheeks.

"Why—why do you say this *now?*" she stammered miserably.

"Because I don't want you to get any false hopes in your head. I want you to avoid him. If you don't, I'll send you back to your box car, bag and baggage. Be as friendly with Hal Armitage as you like, or with any other man you meet, but not with my brother!"

"But," Mittie found courage to say, "if Mr. Armitage knew I was a squatter, not a lady, wouldn't he despise me, too?"

Agatha laughed grimly.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt; but I don't intend that he shall know it—*yet.* I don't care how much *he* is hurt, but I do care about Ronnie. Now go to bed."

Mittie rose slowly. Her bubble of happiness had burst. With limbs suddenly weary, she dragged herself to the door. There she turned, half defiantly.

"Shall I go back to grandpa now?" she demanded.

"No!" Agatha dared not retreat. The joke had gone too far. No matter what it cost her, she must carry it through. Her manner changed a trifle. She must not be too brusque with her *protégée.* "Don't mind what I said, dear. I'm just trying to save you pain. You might fall in love with Ronnie—and he isn't for you."

"I know," Mittie choked. "He isn't for me."

She lay awake a long time in the darkness, her burning eyes tearless, her body icy with the new misery that obliterated all other suffering.

Of what use were the beautiful gowns, of what use was the whole masquerade, if she must push aside love? What did she care for other men's offered admiration, if Ronald's presence were denied her? He had said that she was beautiful. His arm had held her close to him. He had pressed his cheek against her hair. Oh, God, it had been so wonderful—more wonderful than she had dreamed anything could ever be! To go back to the box car now—to go back to grandpa and Lalock, and never see Ronald again—she would rather die!

THE music had long ceased in the restaurant. No sound broke the stillness of the night but the soft moan of the wind as it swept through the fir trees, and the faint, voiceless music of the forest. The moon, a globe of glimmering silver, cast her beams through the French windows, and little shafts of light danced upon the floor with each sway of the branches outside.

Mittie slipped from her bed and drew on her coat. Wrapping it tightly about her, she crossed to one of the French windows, which was slightly ajar, and stood silhouetted in its framework. The first time she had ever heard Ronald's voice she had stood on the balcony, under just such a moon as this.

He advanced, uncertain who the vision might be. Mittie did not turn

She stepped outside, shivering a little as the night air fanned her cheek. She did not see the dark figure four doors away, until a husky voice whispered:

"Lady Marjorie!"

She gave a startled cry, and moved to return to her room, but his "Don't go, please," arrested her.

Trembling, she watched his noiseless approach. He still wore his evening clothes. Apparently he had not retired, though it was well after three o'clock.

For a second they faced each other, neither speaking; then Ronald linked his arm in hers and led her to the balustrade.

"You couldn't sleep, either?" he asked.

"No."

"Tell me, what did I do to-night to make you snub me?"

"Snub you? I never snubbed you!"

"Yes, you did. After our first

dance you scarcely looked at me. You weren't tired, yet you wouldn't go for a stroll with me. I asked you to take a ride in the morning, and you refused. Did you resent what I said about your being so beautiful?"

"No—oh, no!"

"Well, is it Armitage?"

A little laugh caught in her throat.

"No. Only—" She couldn't tell him Agatha's command. She had no right to be here now. She ought to go inside; but she lingered. "I was really tired—and I never ride."

"All English girls ride."

"I don't."

"Honest?"

"Honest."

"I was afraid you thought I was rude. I haven't much finesse, I admit. I usually say what I think; but I surely don't want to offend you."

"You haven't."

"Prove it, then!"

"How?"

"Take a drive with me in the morning. I have a peach of a car. We can make Blood Mountain and back before Agatha drags herself out of bed. After a dance, she never shows up before noon."

Mittie hesitated. In spite of Mrs. Druce's warning, it was a great temptation.

"I—I shouldn't," she stammered.

"Why not? Oh, I see! Agatha has told you about Cecily!"

"Yes."

"Does that make any difference? A fellow can have friends, can't he, even if he is engaged?"

"I suppose so."

"Then it's settled." He laughed and pressed his hand on her arm. "We'll leave at seven o'clock; or is that too early for you?"

"No-o-o," she said, consenting reluctantly, but feeling unbelievably happy again.

"I thought you were an early riser. The mornings up here are too beautiful to miss. I'll meet you in the lobby at seven, shall I?"

"Yes."

She ought not to go. She was risking everything by going; but in any case he would know the truth some day, and would despise her. Some day he would pass out of her life forever. Surely she had the right to one morning of happiness—a few short hours alone with him! Agatha and her threats were pushed aside. Only Ronald mattered.

"Don't stay out here too long," he said with solicitude. "It's too cold."

"I'm going in now."

"So am I."

Her hand was in his, and there was a long pressure of warm, clinging fingers.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night and pleasant dreams," he responded.

CHAPTER VI

ASA BLAINE PAYS A VISIT

ROAN CITY, boasting five thousand inhabitants, nestled in a valley, in the shadow of the mountain after which it was named. It was a prosperous little place, deriving much of its income from tourists who came during the winter months to enjoy its dry, healthful climate and its opportunities for outdoor sports. Occasionally there was snow enough to make golf impossible, but rarely any severe storm. For a brief time the river that skirted the town would be frozen, and would offer good skating. Game was plentiful in the woods, and in spring trout abounded in the streams.

The Summit House, seven miles distant, drew the fashionable resorters, but Roan City was popular. Leonard Lalock, bank president, owner of the one daily newspaper and the largest dry-goods store, with an interest in two hotels, lived at the end of an avenue shaded from the glare of the summer sun by rows of wide-spreading oak trees. His home, a three-story brick mansion with deep verandas, stood in a garden of rose bushes and clipped hedges, and was the show place of the village.

For twelve years Lalock had been a widower, ever since his wife had met her tragic death. Before that he had been a rising young attorney, with no fortune, but having prospects. His marriage with Mary Crane, a wealthy widow from the East, who had spent a winter in Roan City, had given him affluence. At her death he had inherited all that she possessed, and had invested it in his own community. He spent several months of the year abroad, and each time he returned the villagers expected him to bring back a bride; but he had remained single.

Perhaps he would always have remained single if Mittie Blaine's beauty had not changed his decision. For five years an old woman, Amanda Button by name, had been his housekeeper. She had applied for the position at a time when his previous housekeeper was leaving him to be married, and white servants were at a premium. Lalock did not want a negress to have control of his household; and although at first Mrs. Button's appearance almost revolted him, her references were so satisfactory, her manner so efficient, that he had engaged her.

He had never regretted it. Quietly self-effacing, the woman had gone about her household duties, attending to his comfort in a way that left nothing to be desired. She had no friends and apparently no relatives, for she never received any letters and rarely left the grounds. So long as she proved honest and capable, Lalock was not interested in what she did, and paid small attention to her.

He had grown used to her hunched back, her puffy, lashless eyelids, her pasty mask of a face, her thin mouth distorted to a weird grimace; but the night after he had asked Mittie to marry him he came upon her in the hallway, and the bright light, shining full upon her, gave him something of a shock. The woman was hideous, unwholesome, like some evil spirit. How could he have endured her presence all these years? What effect would she have upon a lovely young girl?

Yet she was a good soul. She was faithful, never failing in her duty, and old—very old. It would be a shame to turn her out now.

He went into his library, a little shaken by this contact with his servant. He had always known that she was ugly, but her crippled back, her livid face, and her strange eyes had never affected him so deeply before. He would have to get rid of her. His marriage to Mittie would be a good excuse.

He was fully resolved to make the girl his wife. Her very persistence in refusing him made her more desirable. Her dislike of him only inflamed his passion. He laughed at Asa Blaine's feeble attempt to resist him. Rather heroic of the old squatter to order him off the premises—showed that a touch of manhood was left in the fellow; but he did not dare to go further.

If Lalock wanted Mittie for his wife, he would have her, and Asa knew it. Hatred for the squatter still smol-

dered in the breasts of Roan City's residents. If the truth were known about him, his life wouldn't be worth a dime.

LALOCK'S library was a low-ceilinged room with deep windows opening upon a veranda in front, and upon the garden at the side of the house. There was but one door, which led from the main hallway. On either side of a wide hearth were bookshelves well filled with volumes —novels, classics, histories, biographies, and law books. A low divan stood before the fireplace under a reading lamp.

Here Lalock spent many pleasant hours. He was an inveterate reader, and it was probably because Mittie had displayed such a thirst for knowledge that he had first noticed her.

On the carved oak table in the center of the room were piles of loose paper—bills of lading, accounts, and manuscripts—heaped in a disorderly order that pleased their owner. An oil portrait of the late Mrs. Lalock hung over the mantel. It depicted a young woman, possibly in her early twenties, with reddish hair caught in a round knot at her neck, and bangs covering a low forehead. The face was not a beautiful one, but rather weakly pretty, with wide brown eyes, a petulant red mouth, and a rounded throat and chin. One fancied her a little too stout for beauty, a little too soft for cleverness.

Lalock stared at the portrait for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigar. He had not really loved his wife—her fortune had attracted him more than the woman herself—but her death had been a shock that he could not forget. There were times in the night when he would awake bathed in a cold sweat, thinking he heard her scream. At other times he saw her plainly as she started off that morning, twelve years ago, with a friend, to camp for a few days on the mountain. She was an inveterate hunter, a great sportswoman, and loved to sleep in the open. He had never seen her or the friend again in life.

That portrait must be removed when Mittie became mistress of his home. Mrs. Button must go, too. There was no other way.

He turned to ring for his housekeeper, but before he touched the bell there was a light knock on his door.

"Come in!"

The woman herself, like a gray wraith, with her drab gown hanging in limp folds from her bent and scrawny shoulders, stepped over the threshold.

"There's a man wishes to see you, sir," she said in a toneless voice. "He won't give his name."

"What does he want?"

"I don't know. There's an odor of liquor on him, and he's very shabby. Shall I send him away, sir?"

"No!"

Lalock brushed by her and went into the hall. At the front door, which was half ajar, stood Asa Blaine. A smothered exclamation of annoyance escaped the banker.

"Come in!" he rasped. "Why the devil are you here?"

"I wanted to see you to-night," replied the old man, "and I came."

"Go in there." Lalock motioned to the library. "You're mad to come to my home!"

There was no cringing in the squatter's manner as he walked into the room before his unwilling host. He looked defiantly, half triumphantly, at

the woman who had refused to admit him. Her own expression was unchanged.

"You may go, Mrs. Button," Lalock snapped sharply. "Sit down, Asa," he added, as she noiselessly slipped through the door. "Say what you've got to say, and be quick about it!"

Asa, however, seemed to be in no hurry. Seating himself in an armchair beside the oak table, he drew out his pipe. Then his gaze wandered about the room, finally fastening upon the portrait of Mrs. Lalock. He smiled suddenly.

"Why the devil you came here is beyond me," Lalock rasped again. "I've told you never to do so."

"Yes, I know, and for a good many years I've obeyed you—obeyed you in everything. Now"—the old man bent forward, as if to be more impressive—"I've decided that I don't mean to obey you any longer."

Lalock laughed.

"No?"

"No! Just what did you mean by that threat to my little girl yesterday?"

"I think I made myself plain. Without my protection, where would you be?"

Asa smiled again.

"And without my silence, where would you be?"

"What's that?" inquired Lalock, his erect figure growing rigid.

"My dear Leonard"—in an exasperating drawl—"for fifteen long years you've held threats of the law over my head. Granted that I was an escaped convict when I first appealed to you to help me. Granted that you did, and that I've still got my freedom, such as it is. Granted that I was drunk on the night when the forest took fire, and for days after that, while the fire raged; but who supplied me with the liquor? Who induced me to strike the match that—"

LALOCK'S lips curled in a sneer. "Are you implying that *I* furnished you with liquor or—"

"I am!" Asa rose. There was definite menace in his gaunt frame. "You told me that you wanted to purchase a strip of land on Roan Top to build a hotel. You told me that so long as it was thickly wooded, the government would not sell any of it. You said that if a fire started, there would be no danger to any one's life; but you knew your wife was there that night. You knew—"

"For God's sake!" hissed Lalock, his face suddenly ashen. "Are you insane to say such things?"

He glanced quickly over his shoulder toward the hall door. Asa laughed hoarsely.

"I'm just as insane as you are," the old man went on. "I committed a criminal act at your bidding, because of your threats; but murder was not in my heart when I did it. As sure as you live and breathe, you murdered that woman" — Asa's long, bony fingers pointed to the framed picture—"to secure her fortune. You never wanted that land. You never tried to buy it. You wanted to be rid of *her!*"

"Has this just occurred to you?" Lalock regained a little of his composure, and the ashen color receded. "She died twelve years ago."

"No, I've been sure of it all these years, and the horror of it has made me what I am."

"Then"—Lalock's hand shook a trifle as he lighted a cigarette—"why bother to talk of it now? What good does it do to dig up reasons for anything I may have done? Suppose I changed my mind about wanting the

property. There's nothing strange in that, after what happened. You are the one responsible for that fire, not I."

"I'm speaking of it now because of Mittie," continued Asa. "I know I haven't a leg to stand on. I didn't have before, if you chose to speak, and I have less now; but Mittie is young, and her life isn't to be mixed up in this. If she wanted to marry you, I'd say nothing. You're a scoundrel, but she's lived with me, and I'm a scoundrel, and there isn't much chance for her to do any better. But she doesn't want to marry you. She hates you. Rather than see her forced into marriage with you, I'd tell my story—how you bribed me to set fire to the forest when I was drunk, how—"

Lalock's dry chuckle interrupted him.

"Go ahead! They'll believe that you fired it—never fear, they'll believe *that;* but they won't believe that I had anything to do with it. My word against yours! Go ahead! Talk all you like, and see what happens!"

ASA'S gaze wavered. He fumbled nervously with a button on his shabby coat. The spark of manhood that had given him courage to fight for his granddaughter flickered under the steely glint in the other's slate eyes.

"I'll tell them you hired me—" he mumbled.

"Do! Tell the authorities that Leonard Lalock, lawyer, banker, merchant, club man, hired *you,* an escaped convict, to set fire to the forest. Go on! They'll listen to everything you say. They'll look at your bleary eyes, your dirty rags, and they'll clap you in jail and send for me. And I'll tell them"—his voice was rapier sharp, a whisper of steel that struck to the other's heart—"I'll tell them that I found you dead drunk in the valley after the fire, and rescued you; that for the sake of your little grandchild and our boyhood friendship, I lied for you; but that I wash my hands of you now, you liar and murderer!"

Asa shivered. He dropped back into the chair trembling. A hoarse rattle came from between his dry lips. Cowed, completely craven, he stared at the other man.

Lalock laughed again.

"My dear Asa, don't try to be heroic. You were always a coward, always a cringing rat, even in your boyhood. You never dared to come out in the open with your rascality. Perhaps that's why you attracted me. I knew you'd be useful to me some day. A successful man needs a scoundrel or two for friends. Do you think gratitude prompted me to send you your railroad fare to Roan City? Bah, there's no gratitude in my make-up! I wanted to have you at hand in case I needed you. You served my purpose; but don't try to stick your teeth in me, Asa. I'm steel, and they'd break. Keep your place, hold your tongue, and you're safe. If you want a little money—"

The grizzled head shook. Asa faced his host.

"I don't want any of your money," he said with a dry sob. "It's blood money."

"Squeamish, eh? You prefer to steal it, eh? Satisfactory to me. It's a matter of choice. I can make things mighty pleasant for you, if Mittie becomes my wife, and she's going to become my wife—don't you forget that!"

"No."

"Oh, yes—and without any interference from you. She's going to become my wife—next week, probably.

You're going to urge her to do so. You're going to show her how wise it will be for her to become mistress of this house. You're going to tell her that you wouldn't like to be lynched, at your age."

Asa groaned. His emaciated hands covered his face, and his thin shoulders shook.

Lalock watched him with a triumphant smile on his thin lips. Then he abruptly crossed the room to a cabinet by one of the windows, opened it, and drew out a decanter and a glass. He poured some brandy into the glass, and, touching Asa's shoulder, offered him the drink.

"Here," Lalock said, "pull yourself together. I can see you're unnerved. Now you and I mustn't fight, old man. I'm a tough customer, if you get me started, but I can be a good friend."

Asa drank eagerly. He made one more appeal.

"Let Mittie alone, won't you? She's such a nice child—"

"That's why I want her. Steadier now?" Lalock pressed a button under the table. "Go home, sleep over this, and don't do anything you'll regret. I'll be out to see you to-morrow."

Asa rose. He lurched a little.

"Mittie's gone," he mumbled.

"Gone? Where?" inquired Lalock.

Asa chuckled inanely.

"Maybe you can find out, you're so clever."

Mrs. Button opened the door. Under her puffy lids, her eyes—dead, fishy eyes—stared from one face to the other.

"You rang?" she asked in her toneless voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Button. Show this—gentleman the door."

Not Peace

THEY say love comes with flower in hand
To make the old world new.
They lie. Love comes with flaming sword
To cleave your soul in two!

—*Katherine Metcalf Roof*

"Swanee Newton's girl means nothing to me!"

Moanin' Low

Coralie was modern to her fingertips. Yet when another girl vamped her man—"Darn it," thought Coralie, "I'm just a one-man dog!"

By Helen Ahern

"IT'S her line. Those Southern girls, you know . . .!"

Coralie Howard wrinkled her small nose in distaste, and hesitated a moment before she joined the gay group that had taken possession of her bedroom in the Gamma sorority house. As usual the girls were discussing Eula Stancy, who had come up to Midwestern University from Alabama. Came, saw, and conquered!

"It's the way she says 'dah-h-lin'.' That drawl of hers! Even Bud Chapman has fallen. He's taking her to the Chi Zete party to-night, and . . ."

Coralie flung open the door. This talk about Bud and Eula was unbearable. She set her face in a radiant smile.

"'Lo, Coralie!" Marta Miller, her roommate, broke the embarrassed silence that followed her entrance. "We

were just trying to figure out this strange power that Eula Stancy has over the men."

"Yes?" indifferently. "She's the original 'It' girl. Why, she's even beating my time with Bud!" Coralie's laugh was just a shade too shrill, but her small oval face was serene. Her sorority sisters knew that Bud was two-timing her, but they'd never know how much it hurt, if she could help it.

"It's a rotten shame!" Marta's round, freckled face flushed with indignation. "You and Bud have been like that . . ." She held up two fingers. " . . . for a year now."

"Too long!" Coralie laughed again. With a careless gesture she yanked off her blue felt cloche and tossed it to the bed. "It's time Bud and I both had a new thrill."

As she spoke she busied herself with pushing back the soft wave into her red gold hair and curling Greta Garbo ringlets behind her ears.

She kept her long lashes lowered lest the girls see the pain in her blue-green eyes.

"You don't care, then?" Marta sounded relieved.

She adored Coralie, who had the loveliness and charm which had been denied to her own plain, rotund self.

"Do you hear me moanin' low?" Coralie decided it was time to drop her bombshell. "Swanee Newton's stepping me to the Chi Zete formal tonight."

"Oh, Coralie!" Her news was received with the proper awe. "Aren't you just all of a do-flop?"

Swanee Newton was a mysterious and fascinating figure to the co-eds of Midwestern. Like Eula Stancy, he had come a few months before from Alabama. At first it was rumored that he had followed her, but neither Eula's nor Swanee's attitude toward each other bore out this theory. Sparks of hostility seemed fairly to fly between them when they met.

Swanee, indeed, viewed most of the college activities with an aloof, amused air. Although he had a Chi Zete pin and credentials from the Alabama chapter, he refused to live at the fraternity house.

"Too boring to hang around with a lot of rah-rah boys," he said.

His apartment just off the campus and the parties he gave there were the subject of much gossip. Whisper had it that the wilder element of the University gathered there for poker games where the sky was the limit. Girls came and went, too . . . not co-eds, but actresses from traveling road shows that stopped in the adjoining town of Zanesville.

Swanee's reputation for wildness only added to his fascination for the feminine half of the university. He was a glamorous figure.

"Gee, but you're lucky!" A fluffy, blond-haired Gamma pledge eyed Coralie enviously.

"Lucky's right," she agreed with enthusiasm, but deep down in her heart she felt herself the most unlucky, miserable girl on the campus. She cared nothing for Swanee Newton. In fact, he repulsed rather than attracted her.

The evening ahead loomed up dully. There'd be the long drive to the yacht club, then interminable hours when she must be peppy and gay, while Bud was dancing, laughing—perhaps necking—Eula Stancy!

"Bud, Bud, how could you?" A small voice within her was crying to him. Always before it had been Bud

who had taken her to the Chi Zete parties.

FOR the first time in her nineteen years Coralie Howard was feeling the jealousy and suffering of woman, young or old, who knows her man to be slipping from her. Conquest had come easily to Coralie with her flower face, her sunny hair, and her slim, lovely body. Before Eula Stancy's advent she had been the most popular girl at Midwestern. It wasn't sharing her popularity with another that Coralie minded. But she wouldn't share Bud!

Coralie's cheeks flamed even at the memory of that last Chi Zete party when Bud had ducked two dances on her while he sat out in his roadster with Eula.

He had attempted a feeble apology to Coralie. "I had to talk to her about . . . about something," he had said evasively. "I'll explain some day. But honest, Coralie, I didn't neck her!"

"As if I cared!" Coralie tossed her bright head. "You can neck the whole State of Alabama for all of me. But you'll never have a chance to stand me up again while you do it!"

"So you're going to be like that and call me a liar!" Bud had a temper of his own. His gray eyes darkened with anger and his lean, youthful face hardened.

The miserable quarrel was on. Somehow before it was finished the Chi Zete pin that had nestled over Coralie's heart was restored to Bud's vest.

Perhaps she had been hasty. Coralie was beginning to regret her pride and stubbornness a little now. After all, it had been a girl's job from time immemorial to forgive a man's lapses.

If she had known how horribly lonesome life would be without Bud, she'd have forgiven him. The last two weeks had been ghastly. And this Chi Zete party would be even worse. She could get no thrill out of a date with Swanee Newton. Not when Bud was taking languorous-eyed seductive Eula Stancy.

"Darn it, I'm a one-man dog," Coralie thought ruefully.

All at once it seemed to her that she could keep up the pretense of gayety no longer. "Guess I'd better dress." She gathered up a handful of filmy lingerie and turned toward the bathroom.

"Oh, my word, I didn't know it was so late." The blond pledge jumped up. "I'm dated for this brawl, too."

ONLY Marta was left in the room when Coralie emerged from her bath, her slim body shining through chiffon scanties.

"You're the best-looking thing, Coralie." With unfailing admiration Marta watched her roommate dress. "I can't understand how Bud Chapman could give you the air even for Eula Stancy."

"Oh, for gosh sakes, lay off!" The silver slipper in Coralie's hand hit the opposite corner. "Can't you talk about something else besides Eula Stancy?"

"I—I'm sorry I'm a nuisance." Marta gulped down tears. "I'll get out." She started for the door.

"Oh, you blessed, sweet, old thing!" Coralie cried, and quickly was after her. "Don't pay any attention to my grouches. It—it's just that I feel so rotten about—about everything."

Understanding leaped to Marta's near-sighted blue eyes. "Coralie Howard, you've been handing me apple sauce! You *do* care about Bud." Her huff forgotten, she turned back sympathetically.

"Yes, I do," Coralie assented slow-

ly. It was impossible to conceal the truth from Marta.

"Then why let that little Sheba from Alabama walk off with him?"

Coralie decided to reveal her secret purpose. "I'm not! I won't! I just made this date with Swanee to-night to take a rise out of Bud. I thought it would teach him a lesson and—"

"He'd come romping back?" Marta nodded. "Not a bad idea, but don't make him too jealous."

"He probably won't even see me—not when Eula's around," Coralie sighed, and resumed her dressing.

"If he doesn't see you it's not the fault of that dress," Marta said as Coralie pirouetted before her for inspection.

She was breath-takingly lovely. The pale green stiffened chiffon of her dress molded her round young body and slender waist and flared abruptly at the knees into a skirt that just cleared the tips of her silver slippers. She was an alluring combination of demureness and sophistication . . . a perfect 1930 maiden. The long, transparent skirt veiled but revealed her slender, silk-shod legs, and her arms and shoulders emerged cream-white above the low cut bodice. Against the green her hair took on a brighter flame and her eyes glowed with emerald lights.

"You're a wow!" Marta approved with slangy sincerity.

Swanee Newton seconded the verdict in much more poetic language when Coralie met him in the Gamma reception room.

"You're a mermaid in that dress." His voice was low and caressing. "A mermaid who steals men's hearts and senses."

Coralie could feel herself flushing under his dark, devouring gaze. No man had talked like that to her before. The university boys contented themselves with telling a girl that she looked pretty keen. She could feel a tingle in her veins, half pleasurable, half frightened.

Swanee's fingers closed tightly around her arm as he led her to his roadster. Coralie's eyes sought the Chi Zete house across the street. She hoped that Bud was around to see her settle down in Swanee's swanky car.

WITH a roar the roadster tore across the campus and left the lights of Zanesville behind. Once on the yacht club road, Swanee slowed down and slipped his right arm around Coralie.

She accepted the embrace passively. Left-handed drivers were the rule rather than the exception at Midwestern. Yet again she had that vague sense of fear. The way Swanee held her was different . . disturbing. His hand shoved aside her white velvet evening cape and strayed up and down her bare arm.

The car swerved to a side road.

"Where are you going?" Coralie asked sharply.

"Not far." Swanee laughed as if amused by her involuntary betrayal of fright. "We're stopping right here." He pulled up to the edge of the road.

"We'll be late for the party."

"What difference does that make? These fraternity brawls are blah anyhow. Besides, I need a drink." He drew a flask from his pocket. "Baby want the bottle?"

Coralie shook her head.

"It's good for little girls . . . real Alabama 'moon,' aged in the bottle, and it does things to your inhibitions."

"I like my inhibitions," Coralia said coolly.

"I don't." He laughed, but did not urge the flask upon her. Instead he raised it to his own lips.

"Now, let's go." Coralie's voice took on an edge of impatience. "I want to get to that party."

"And I want to kiss you." Swanee's arm tightened. His dark, handsome face came close. "In fact, I'm going to kiss you. Coralie!" His voice grew hoarse. "I'm mad about you. You're so lovely and unawakened. You make me want to waken you."

"No, no! Don't be silly." Coralie tried to free herself. She was genuinely terrified by the naked, hot desire in his eyes.

Her protest was smothered by his lips...moist and seeking. She felt her breath, her very strength going from her.

"You've never been kissed like that, have you?" Swanee released her after what seemed hours.

"No! You're a beast." A shuddering revulsion shook Coralie.

"Just a man, beautiful, who's wild about you. Don't you know you're made for love?" His fingers caressed her smooth shoulders. "You're cold and distant, but there's fire under your lovely ice. I'm going to make it blaze. I'm going to kiss you until you like my kisses. I'm going to teach you how to kiss. How to love!"

"Thanks," flippantly, "but I've already taken a post grad course in that subject."

"You're in the kindergarten class," Swanee scoffed. "You Northern girls are amateurs when it comes to love."

"I suppose Eula Stancy knows how to kiss," Coralie suggested, feeling a prick of jealousy.

"Eula's a hot little sugar." A reminiscent smile lighted his face. "But I'm no kiss and tell guy. Quiz Bud Chapman about her kisses. He's Eula's big moment right now."

CORALIE'S pink, pointed nails cut into her palms. Bud couldn't belong to any one else! He was hers. She remembered his shy, boyish caresses, the tender, half reverent way he had taken her in his arms. She wished desperately that she were beside him in his old Blue Comet, and that Swanee Newton were a thousand miles away.

But Swanee was unforgettably present. She could feel his amused, appraising glance that seemed to read her very thoughts.

"Did you date me for a buggy ride or the Chi Zete formal?" she asked pointedly.

"I've forgotten." He was irritatingly undisturbed.

"I haven't. And if you don't want to take me out to the yacht club you can turn around and drive back to the house." Little points of anger sparkled in Coralie's eyes.

"Such a pretty little shrew!" mockingly.

"Please!" Coralie resorted to pleading. "I've got a special reason for wanting to be at that brawl to-night."

"Want to see Bud Chapman?"

Coralie's flush was a confession.

"Coralie, Coralie!" Swanee took a mock reproachful tone. "So you gave me the come-hither in the Libe the other day, and wangled this date out of me just to make a silly rah-rah boy jealous."

"Of course not." She was furious that Swanee should have guessed that she was deliberately trying to win back Bud's straying affections.

"Then prove it." He gripped her shoulders. "Kiss me just once as if you meant it, and I'll believe you."

"All right, I will." Coralie lifted her shamed face and her tempting scarlet mouth. "But you must take me on to the party."

Swanee stared at those inviting red lips. "It's a bargain," he said, and gathered her to him.

"Break! Time's up." Coralia managed at length to draw her mouth from his. She fought an almost irresistible desire to scrub away that kiss with her handkerchief.

"You're improving. That was almost a real kiss." Swanee grinned mockingly. "I'll have a little drink on it and then show you that I'm a man of my word by dragging you to the dance."

Coralie breathed a little sigh of relief.

The dance was well under way when they reached the yacht club. Their late arrival was hailed with wise cracks.

"What did you do...drive out in reverse? Don't say it was a flat tire!"

"Why should we?" Coralie laughed, recklessly conscious that Bud was watching her with scornful, furious eyes.

She had spied him and Eula the moment she entered. Eula was at her best in a clinging, very décolleté dress of black crape. In it she looked older, wiser, and more mysterious than the girls about her. Her eyes were pools of darkness, a trifle sad, vaguely hard, decidedly provocative. Her hair, even blacker than her dress, shaped her head and curved in two dusky wings against her rougeless cheeks.

At the sight of her a fierce, primitive hatred surged up in Coralie. She returned Bud's outraged glare with an insolent toss of her red-gold head.

Bud took a step forward, but stopped himself and turned back to Eula with exaggerated devotion. The Southern girl looked up with her slow smile and melted into his arms in the embrace of the dance.

"Shall we strut our stuff?" Swanee touched Coralie's arm.

"Let's go!" Coralie resumed her radiant mask, as she let him lead her toward the dance floor.

Swanee danced in a languid, sensuous fashion, molding his body against her body. Willfully Coralie pressed closer to him. Over his shoulder she could see Bud and Eula moving as one. She caught Bud's eyes once, but he looked away.

Coralie gave Swanee a swift, upward glance through her long lashes. She was flirting with him in flagrant imitation of Eula.

"You've got that thing!" Swanee hummed in tune to the orchestra. His lips brushed her hair.

HOURS slipped by. The party grew gayer as midnight passed. It was like all other parties, Coralie thought a little wearily. There was the little freshman girl with a giggling jag...the moonlight waltz where you were kissed by a half seen partner ...the couples who disappeared into parked cars. Like all other parties, but different.

To-night there was no Bud for her. Always before it had been Bud who kissed her during the moonlight waltz; Bud who had taken her out to his Blue Comet during intermission. Bud!

Coralie's eyes followed him involuntarily. She was tiring of Swanee. Her old fear of him returned. He had emptied his flask and made a trip out to the roadster to replenish it. His step was growing a bit uncertain. His face was flushed and his eyes smoldered when they rested upon her.

He tried to tempt her for a stroll through the grounds. "But everybody is doing it. Why pull the frigidaire stuff on me?" He grew more insistent as the end of the evening approached. "You hand me a hot line and then won't even come out and look at the moon with me. I've a good notion to pick you up and carry you off. Dare me?" He was pulling her toward the French doors.

"Don't be ridic!" Coralie planted herself firmly on her little silver slippers and resisted his efforts. "I'm not..."

The protest died on her lips. Just ahead was Bud, leading Eula Stancy down the veranda steps.

Coralie changed a half sob into a hysterical laugh. "I don't care." Her voice was shrilly gay. "Come on... I'll race you to the beach."

She caught Swanee's hand and hurried him past the couple ahead. She'd show Bud. Let him take Eula out and neck her if he wanted. He wasn't the only one who could throw a petting party!

"Coralie!" Bud stretched out his hand as she raced by him. His voice was urgent and beseeching. The light from the veranda illumined his troubled, grave, young face.

"Sorry, Big Boy, but Swanee and I have a date with the moon." Coralie flung defiance over her shoulder. Dog in the manger stuff! He had Eula. Why should he try to interfere?

"What is this, a track meet?" Swanee puffed after her across the velvety lawn, down to the sandy beach. There he halted firmly. "This marathon's gone far enough." He selected a smooth stone and drew her down beside him. "I came out here for something besides exercise."

His arms were about her, and his breath, hot and liquor laden, was on her cheek.

Coralie closed her eyes and lay passive against his shoulder. She couldn't refuse his kisses. By coming out here with him she had let herself in for a necking party. She'd have to see if through.

"You little iceberg!" Swanee became irritated by her unresponsiveness. "I might as well be kissing a wax doll."

"Why not swap me for one?" Coralie asked impishly.

"Because you're the most bewitching...the most delectable..."

"Change the record!" With a twist of her lithe body, Coralie freed herself and sprang to her feet. "It must be almost time to start home."

Sulkily Swanee followed her up from the beach.

"WHY, everybody's gone!" Coralie stopped in dismay as she saw the darkened clubhouse. In the distance the tail lights of departing cars gleamed redly. "Hurry!" She motioned Swanee impatiently toward his roadster which stood parked alone. "We can still overtake them."

"You certainly have a passion for crowds," Swanee grumbled as he vaulted into the driver's seat.

"But it looks queer, us staying here until the last."

"It's going to look queerer if I can't start this bus."

He laughed as he pressed the starter ineffectually for the third time.

"You'll have to crank it," Coralie suggested practically.

"Impossible. Besides I have no crank." Swanee leaned back in the seat. "We're stuck, that's all."

"All?" A note of panic crept into

Coralie's voice as she grasped the situation. "But how'll we get home? Every other car is miles away by this time. Even the club employees are gone." She turned upon him in exasperation. "How can you sit there calmly and say that's all?"

"But, beautiful, how else can I sit but calmly? Shall I break into tears and pull out handfuls of hair?"

"You might try to find out what's wrong. Look at the engine, the battery!"

"The battery was just recharged today, so there's no use bothering with that. I don't know a thing about machinery, but I'll take a look at the engine if it makes you feel any better." Coralie held a flash light for him while he lifted the hood and explored the inner workings of the roadster.

Her heart thudding sickeningly, she raced Swanee to the beach

"Looks all right to me, but I'm no authority on engines," he said at length.

"Well, let's get some one who is. We'll have to break in and use a telephone."

It was the work of only a few minutes to break a pane in one of the French doors and loosen the safety catch. Swanee found an electric switch and turned a flood of light on the deserted ballroom. The canvas cover on the dancing floor gave the place a ghostlike air. Coralie shivered and hurried to the coatroom where there would surely be a telephone.

"But there's no answer." She jiggled the hook frantically.

"No service yet," Swanee said calmly. "You know the club isn't officially open."

"There must be a caretaker at the lodge," Coralie said, but her voice was a little shaky. Tears struggled to her eyes.

"He doesn't move out until after the opening. I was on the dance committee and we had to call him at the village of Lakeside."

Swanee gave this information with irritating blandness.

"Oh, I think you planned this!" Coralie's temper flared. "Any other man I know would break his neck to get me out of this jam."

"And I'd break my neck to keep you in it. The arrangements suit me to perfection. You and I . . . a cozy clubhouse . . . no silly collegiate crowd around. It's perfect!"

"You don't think I'm going to stay here, do you?" Coralie whirled for the door.

"I not only think it, I know it!" Swanee was before her, blocking the way. "You're not going to leave me now. You don't really want to." There was a triumphant, conquering glow in his narrowed eyes. He picked her up bodily from the floor.

"You conceited idiot!" Coralie's slim hand flashed out and caught him squarely across his smiling mouth.

His hold loosened. In a second she was out of his arms and racing for the stairway. He caught at her flying skirts. There was a sound of ripping cloth. But she was free! She reached the ladies' lounge just ahead of him. She slammed the door . . . bolted it in his face!

"Coralie!" Swanee flung himself furiously against the barrier.

She gave a little, panting laugh as she saw the stout mahogany hold and heard his fluent curses.

"You little devil!" Her laugh incensed him and he made another lunge.

"You'll only bang yourself up, so follow your own advice and take things calmly." With the heavy door between them Coralie dared to mock him.

"Be a good scout and let me in." Swanee took a pleading tone. "I'll behave. It's lonesome out here."

"Never!" Coralie moved away from the door and fumbled for the electric button.

Her negative carried conviction. She heard Swanee's retreating footfalls on the polished stairs.

For more than an hour she sat tensely, listening, waiting. Somehow she must escape from the club and walk or pick up a ride into town. Yet she dared not venture downstairs, and there was a thirty-foot drop from the windows of the dressing room to the rock gardens below.

DEAD silence settled. Coralie suspected that Swanee, well fortified with his flask, would soon fall asleep, but it was dawn before she took courage to tiptoe from the lounge.

Cautiously she slipped down the stairs until she reached the first landing which gave her a view of the ballroom. In the dim morning light she saw Swanee sprawled out as she had ex-

pected. The flask lay on the floor where it had fallen from his relaxed hand.

Holding her breath, Coralie moved past him quietly, to the door that they had broken open.

The cool, damp breath of the morning was welcome in her face. She ran on winged feet down the drive to the stranded roadster.

She knew nothing about that particular imported car, but she had driven a coupé of her own for five years, and had a mechanical sense rare in girls. In spite of Swanee's protests, she believed that battery trouble caused the car's balkiness.

On impulse she tugged at the heavy upholstered seat until she raised it and had access to the battery beneath.

Her green-blue eyes widened . . . then clouded with swift suspicion. A wire was dangling loosely, as if it had been wrenched free—the wire that connected the starter! No wonder it had buzzed so helplessly. She fumbled in the door pocket until she found a monkey wrench and then set to work on the loose connection.

As she worked dark thoughts darted across her mind. Was it possible that Swanee had purposely disconnected the starter? He had refused to look at the battery! But the surmise was too absurd. Such things didn't happen except in fiction . . . not to girls like herself with a college man . . . a fraternity man . . . a Chi Zete.

She wiped her blackened hands on a wisp of pocket handkerchief and climbed into the driver's seat. Her foot pressed the starter. With a welcome roar the motor responded.

"Coralie! Coralie! Have a heart!"

Aroused by the exhaust of the car, Swanee rushed to the veranda and signalled her frantically as she backed into the drive.

Coralie was tempted to drive off and leave him to his fate. Yet if the loose wire *had* been an accident, it would be a rotten trick to make him roller skate home. She slowed down.

"You'll behave yourself?" she asked.

"You won't know me," he promised, grinning. "I've already conceded this round to you.

"How on earth did you get this bus started?" He climbed in and questioned her with such complete surprise that her suspicions were allayed.

"Easily," she began coldly. "There was a loose. . . ."

She broke off and jammed on the brakes with a jerk that almost sent Swanee through the windshield. A man had leaped in front of the car. He was shaking his fist.

"What's the idea hanging around until this hour?" He came up to the side of the roadster, glaring. "I saw your car parked when I left last night. . . ."

"The caretaker!" It was a frightened whisper from Coralie.

"Now, my good man," Swanee drew out his billfold, "no harm done." He extended a ten dollar bill.

"Don't you 'good man' me." The caretaker was in no way pacified. "I don't want your money. I'm sick of you collitch guys and your brazen hussies. You're a filthy lot of. . . ."

Coralie covered her ears to shut out the vile abuse.

"Drive on. Let him rave." Swanee urged her to start. "Pay no attention to the old fogy."

"But that's what people will think of me," Coralie could not shake off her sense of shame.

It deepened rather than lessened as she made her way, weary and bedraggled, into the awakening Gamma House an hour later. Very silently she

stole up the stairs, trying to reach her own room unseen.

"Miss Howard, what does this mean?"

Coralie paused with a hand on her doorknob and regarded the house matron. "Car trouble!" she said hastily, and dived through the door. She was too tired for further explanation. Marta, who was sitting up in bed sleepily, stared open-mouthed. She took in Coralie's white face, her shadowed eyes, her ruined dress.

"You poor darling, what's happened?"

"Oh, it was terrible." At Marta's sympathy Coralie's calm broke. Words came from her in an incoherent flood as she sobbed out the events of the night.

With pats and soft words Marta soothed her into quiet, stripped off the torn dress and tucked her into bed.

"You're an angel," Coralie said gratefully as blessed sleep began to settle over her.

"Oh, pipe down!" Marta was as embarrassed as a small boy. "Do a shut-eye now until noon."

"But I've got a ten thirty class." Coralie sat up with a jerk.

Not until she had seen Marta set the alarm clock for ten did she settle back. That ten thirty class was important. Bud had a class in the same building. She would meet him on the way.

IT was exactly ten twenty when Coralie, freshened by a cold shower, appeared on the Gamma porch. In her slim, white, shantung tennis dress she looked cool and lovely and none the worse for her last night's experience. She had dressed carefully, matching her green baku sports hat with a scarf and slender pumps of the exact shade of green.

In the brightness of the May sunshine she could almost believe that the hours at the yacht club had been a bad dream. She dallied on the porch steps, watching the Chi Zete house opposite.

"Bud!" Her heart gave a leap as the Chi Zete's door opened, and a tall young man came out. The sun glinted on his bared, tawny head. She waved to him eagerly.

Bud stopped, hesitated for a second, and then crossed the street.

"Aren't you up early for the morning after?" His voice was oddly strained, his face unsmiling.

"I—I wanted to see you." Coralie felt chilled and frightened by the sternness of his gray eyes.

"Really?" ironically. "What could Swanee Newton's girl want with me?"

"I'm not Swanee Newton's girl!"

"Yet you stay out with him until seven in the morning. I saw you come in." Mingled pain and anger distorted his young face.

It couldn't be Bud—her Bud—who was looking at her so coldly, despising her, thinking the worst! He was cruel, unfair! Pride stiffened Coralie's slender body.

"What is it to you? You've got Eula—"

"I told you I would explain—"

"And I can explain last night!"

"You can't explain the fact that you deliberately made a date with a rounder like Newton, that you—"

"I don't even care to try!" Coralie stopped his angry denunciation with an imperious gesture and whirled away before he could see the tears that clouded her green blue eyes.

She never forgot the day that followed. The first exhilaration of the morning was gone, leaving a throbbing headache and a persistent pain in her heart. Bud hated and despised her!

The thought pounded dully against her brain. As from afar she heard the drone of professors' voices through endless classes.

It seemed all a part of the general wretchedness of life that she should find in her post office box at the end of the miserable day a blue slip from the dean's office. She read it worriedly:

> Please call at this office at 10 A.M. to-morrow.
>
> R. A. NICKELS,
> Dean of Student Affairs.

What could it mean? Had Dean Nick already heard of last night's escapade? Had that awful caretaker made a complaint?

"Did you get one, too?"

She looked up to see Swanee Newton holding out a similar slip.

HER worst fears were true! Coralie's heart sank.

"What will we do?" She knew only too well the consequences. University authorities had little tolerance of such follies.

"Come on out for a ride and we'll talk it over," Swanee proposed, and propelled her toward his roadster.

He drove swiftly across the campus until they reached the River Drive. The cool breeze eased Coralie's aching head, but as the physical pain lessened her imagination became all the more active.

"Guess we're in for it," Swanee said almost lightly.

"We'll be shipped! I'll have to turn in my Gamma pin!" She clenched her white hands tensely. "And dad—" She couldn't go on. Her invalid father would never survive the shock and disgrace of her expulsion from the university. His conception of womanhood was a Victorian one, his ideal Coralie's dead mother, the sheltered pastel girl of another generation.

"Lots of people get shipped from college."

"I can't stand it—I can't! I'll run away!" Coralie's voice was taut and quivering.

"You mean that?" Swanee was studying her with keen, avid eyes. Grief had lent a poignant loveliness to her small face. Her great eyes were emerald bright with desperation. He moved closer and covered her trembling hands with one of his.

"Why not run away with me?"

"So you're going to do right by our Nell and marry her?" Coralie said with a pitiful attempt at raillery.

"Marry?" Swanee gulped. "Yes, yes—of course! I'm wild about you, Coralie. Listen!" He slowed to a snail's pace. "Why not beat it tonight? Then you won't have to face the dean to-morrow! We can run down to Chicago—and—and get married there. Come on, be a sport. Say it's a date!"

"I don't care." Coralie heard a tired voice—her own—agree. Swanee's plan after all was a way out. An elopement would stifle scandal. Her father would understand and forgive a romantic, runaway marriage. As for herself, nothing seemed to matter much. Bud had given her the air.

"You darling!" Swanee leaned over as if to kiss her, but at Coralie's involuntarily withdrawal, he brushed his lips to her hair. "Let's get started quick." He launched into plans.

He'd drive her to the Gamma House and wait just around the corner until she packed a bag. Then they'd go on to his apartment while he gathered up his own luggage.

Coralie had a feeling that she was

hurry. I like to look at you—to know that you belong to me—to kiss you!" He set down his glass and drew her closer.

"No—please!" Coralie fended him off.

"But what the devil? You're mine now. Act like it!"

"No, no, no!" Of a sudden she realized the impossibility of what she was about to do. "I'm not yours! Never!" She had been mad to think that she could elope with Swanee when the sight of his cruel, sensual mouth sent shivers of repulsion through her, when his touch made her feel faint and sick.

"You're trying to give me a stand up?" Swanee's dark eyes narrowed with anger and bafflement.

"I'm sorry, but I can't go through with this."

Swanee jerked her back to the couch. "It's too late to pull that stuff. I'm not going to give you up. I've loved a lot of girls, but not the way I love you. I want you and I'm going to have you!" His voice had a quivering, passionate monotony. His tense fingers bruised the delicate flesh of her shoulders.

Stark fear turned Coralie's blood to ice. "Let me go! Let me—" Her voice rose hysterically.

He crushed her against his shoulder, stifling her cries. She could feel his lips on her hair—her throat—her mouth.

A peremptory rap sounded on the door. "Newton! Open up!" A man's voice outside.

Coralie recognized that voice. It called her back from the bottomless void into which she was sinking. "Bud!" she cried gladly.

"Hush!" Swanee clapped a hand to her mouth.

But Bud heard. "Coralie!" he answered her, and lunged against the door.

"Wait a minute. I'll unlock." Swanee crossed to the door. There was fear in his eyes.

BUD hurled himself into the room. His haggard gaze sought Coralie. "You're all right?"

At her wordless nod he drew a long breath and swung on Swanee. His gray eyes were black, and his hard young arms were tensed. "You lousy bum!" He advanced threateningly.

"No, you can't do this to me." Swanee shrank visibly. "It's all right. We're going to be married. Isn't that so, Coralie?"

"Yes, Bud," she said in a very small voice.

"You little fool!" Bud's scorn lashed her. "You can't marry him. He's already married!"

"You're crazy!" Swanee tried to bluster, but his voice was hollow.

"Eula!" Bud strode to the door and flung it open.

Coralie stared speechless as Eula Stancy walked into the room.

"Didn't expect me to start claiming you, did you, old dear?" Eula's smile flicked the cowering Swanee maliciously. "But it won't be for long. Bud took me to a lawyer to-day who's going to annul the fatal ceremony."

Swanee, however, was paying little attention to her. His eyes were on Bud, who had stripped off his coat with a businesslike air.

"What—what are you going to do?" He stuttered with fright.

"Give you the beating you deserve!"

"No, Bud," Eula interfered. "Heaven knows he has several beatings coming, but think of the mess for me . . . for Coralie!"

"What has happened?" She put her hand to her head

An Innocent Vampire

Destiny dealt her a hand in a dangerous game with love as stake

By Elsa Chesterton

"YOU will love me forever and ever? Swear it?"

Roy Chalmers's black eyes burned into Star's. The girl shivered slightly.

"Yes, yes; of course I love you, dear," she answered mechanically.

"You're not regretting it?"

"No, no; of course not. Aren't we to be married to-morrow?"

He held her hand tightly, convulsively.

"Yes, to-morrow. Star—you're my salvation. Kiss me again, darling!"

Star put a little shaking hand on the boy's shoulder—for he was no more than a boy to her, though very, very dear. Her hand stole up and rumpled his hair, that would wave in spite of his efforts to keep it sleek.

ning through that adorable head of yours?" He looked whimsically at her. "You are still very angry with me, are you not? Determined to escape at the least opportunity?"

Star cast discretion to the winds. It was her last chance to protest she was not what he thought her; her last chance to convince him that he had made a big mistake. She did not undeceive him. Instead she sank down on the divan at the foot of the bed.

"I give in," she said. "Whatever I am, I know when I am beaten." She paused. "And now, unless you want me to appear downstairs in a dressing-gown, won't you let your servants bring me my clothes?"

The words were spoken calmly enough, though her heart beat suffocatingly fast beneath the laces confining it. She looked straight at him, and he had a vision of starry, childish eyes, a red, provocative mouth, pearly teeth.

"I demand my clothes and to be allowed to leave here at once!"

A child's face, with a subtle woman's brain behind it. Yet he was quick to pick her up at her own game.

"Certainly," he replied. "I am glad you are going to be sensible. I really did not give you credit for such intelligence. You shall have your clothes, and then perhaps you will honor me by joining me at dinner?"

He, too, smiled, and flicked the ash off his cigar.

"I only know by hearsay. I've never met a notorious vamp in the flesh before. You don't quite fit the picture, you know."

Instantly she was on the alert. She tilted back her head, stretched out her slim legs toward the fire.

"Perhaps that is why I have got away with so much," she said. "Between fellow tricksters, I can afford to be frank, can I not? I have succeeded because I do not look what I am."

He nodded understandingly.

"Haven't you often hated the life?"

She wanted to laugh. Instead, she sighed heavily, looked into the fire and lowered her eyes.

"Perhaps," she responded. "At times one is very lonely playing a lone hand."

"You were after Roy's money, weren't you? You knew of the fortune that would be his?"

She sighed.

"What girl doesn't want money? It can do so much for her."

He, too, sighed. Silently they regarded the glowing embers of the fire.

"Tell me something," she said presently. "How have you explained my presence here?"

"They believe you to be my cousin," he answered. "They think there has been a slight motor accident. It was very simple."

She nodded. "Your planning was perfect."

His mouth hardened. He felt she was laughing at him.

"If I do a thing, I like to do it well," he replied gruffly.

"Of course," she mocked. "Even to kidnaping girls."

Eye met eye in challenge, and each knew a secret thrill. A little flame appeared in his; her own dilated, widened. The hand that held the cigar trembled slightly, hers lying idly in her lap, convulsed.

Dangerous game of make-believe; where would it lead them both?

"Have I your permission to retire, sir?" she asked with dignity.

He took her hand.

"Call me Derek while you are here. It will make things easier," he begged her.

"Easier for you," she replied swiftly. "What about me?"

"I'll do my best not to worry you needlessly, unless you try to escape," he answered gravely.

She shook her head.

"I shall not try to do that unless you relax your guard. The way would be too difficult, and I am fond of comfort!" She smiled, turned, and left him standing there, silent and alone.

When she had vanished up the stairway, Derek Chalmers flung himself down in front of the dying fire, his brow creased. He had an uncomfortable feeling that the fascinating creature upstairs was laughing at him. That she, not he, held the upper hand. And that she knew it!

His eye became fixed on something lying on the Persian rug at his feet. He picked it up. It was her handkerchief, a thing of fragility and lace, and a sweet perfume like wood violets. Odd that a vamp should select so unsophisticated a perfume! He would return it to her in the morning, he told himself. He put it away in his pocketbook.

"Oh, well, bed for me," he remarked to the grandfather clock in the corner. "Old-timer, my first week back in the family home promises to be exciting, if nothing else!"

Then he, too, turned and made his

way slowly, thoughtfully, up the old oak staircase.

IT was with a shock that Star awakened one morning to the knowledge that her time of imprisonment was nearly up. Three months, Derek had said; three months, and then she could go.

It was September. The air had a zephyr-like quality, the sun shone warmly.

Star ran across to her window and flung it wide. She would be sorry to leave this lovely place, though it had been virtually a prison. The time had flown on winged feet, until at last she had almost come to regard herself as an honored guest, and not a prisoner at all.

True, Derek had disappeared for long periods, leaving her to amuse herself, but to a nature-loving girl like Star, that was not difficult. She had taken long rambles down the rocky road that surrounded the estate, though she knew, had she overstepped her bounds, she would have been seized and brought back. She never did, however, because she no longer wished to. The deception had continued, and with it her love—for such she acknowledged it to herself—had grown for the man who was her jailer.

"Mr. Derek will be back this evening, miss," the woman told her as she served her steaming coffee at breakfast. Star nodded happily. He had been away nearly a week. She looked forward to his home-coming.

She went down the cliff side after the meal and gathered armfuls of leaves, which she brought back and placed about in the lounge. He had never said so, but she felt instinctively that he liked her touches about the place.

Toward evening she began to grow strangely restive, excited.

They always dressed for dinner when Derek was at home, and to-night Star put on a frock she had bought especially for her trousseau—a soft cream lace that foamed out round her feet and left her neck and arms quite bare. She wore no jewelry, but she made a large Victorian posy of some wild flowers and pinned them to one white shoulder. As she did so she heard the car coming up the drive, and her heart beat fast. He had come back! Their time together was growing shorter and shorter, and she knew a wild ache as she visualized what her life would be when she no longer saw him any more.

There came a knock on her door.

"Mr. Derek wants to know if you can possibly come and meet him in the library at once?" the woman asked.

"Why, yes, Mary. Is anything wrong?"

"I don't know, miss, but the master seems anxious like."

STAR hastened downstairs.

"You wanted to see me," she said as she closed the heavy library door behind her.

Derek wheeled round at her approach, and she was shocked beyond words at the changed expression on his face. He was white as a sheet, and looked across at her with a world of contrition in his eyes.

"My dear," he said, without preamble, "I have been doing you a very great wrong. I have discovered that you are not the notorious woman I thought you to be, but an innocent girl whom Roy was deceiving by marrying without telling of his past."

Her hand crept up to her heart. Wordlessly she gazed at him.

He came forward, took one of her hands.

"Can you ever forgive me? I behaved rashly, abominably. If you like, you can prosecute me—"

"Oh, no, no," she interposed hastily. "I would not do that, Derek!"

"I can't tell you what a cad I feel. I realize now I ought to have made the most searching inquiries before doing what I did, but I had little time to do anything but—act!"

"I know. You must not blame yourself too much. Derek, I—I understand!"

He held her eyes with his own.

"You forgive me, like that? You, who have been as badly treated as any woman on earth? My dear, I simply don't understand!"

Greatly daring, she came forward, laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"I, too, have deceived you," said Star in a soft little voice. "I never told you who I was. I was content to let you believe I was the bad girl you thought me. Shall I tell you why? Because, even before my marriage, I had already regretted it. I had been swept off my feet by your brother's impetuous wooing. I was—sorry for him. He was lonely, and there was only me to take care of him. And so I consented to marry him, and repented it bitterly afterward. Your coming was a salvation to me. At the time I was bewildered, outraged, but afterward—afterward, I was weak enough to make it an excuse not to reveal my identity."

He heard her out in silence—that low, throbbing, fresh young voice that often, in the stilly silences of the night, he had remembered with a stifled sigh, a thrill. And then he turned so swiftly that she would have fallen back if he had not caught her by the shoulders.

"Look at me!" he demanded. "Tell me again that you do not love my brother. Tell me!"

White to the lips, she answered:

"I do not love him. I was only sorry for him!"

His hands fell away.

"Yes, you are being honest. You do not love him, but there is love in your eyes for some one. I can see it!" His voice broke. "I have humiliated you beyond forgiveness. And now—now, of course, you want to go."

"I don't!" The words escaped her in spite of herself. "I've been happier here than I've ever been in my life before."

"You don't want to go!" His face was whiter still. "Then can it mean that you stayed because you wanted to? Tell me—oh, my very dear, tell me—am I the reason why you stayed?"

She could not answer him with words, but the color slowly mounted to her neck and brow.

"Star, my darling! And I never knew. Never guessed!"

NEXT moment she was in his arms, held cruelly tight against a leaping heart. She could not speak, could hardly breathe; she could only feel, and though crushed almost to suffocation, she knew wild tumultuous joy. Primitive and unashamed, she had lied to get this man, and joy was hers in the knowledge that she had won him.

"Darling, my darling," he breathed, "it's been terrible for me, living near you, and not daring to utter a word. At first I fought against it, but it was too strong to be denied. And I—I thought you were making a fool of me."

She struggled for breath. Now was the time to tell him, now or never.

"Listen," she whispered. "That wasn't the only reason why I never revealed my true identity. I loved you from the first, Derek, but I thought you'd never notice me if you didn't believe me to be a really bad girl. I thought it was the glamour of that that made me attractive to you, and so—so I went on deceiving you, playing up to what you believed me to be. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" His tone was gentler now. "Is there anything I can do to make you forgive me for my shameful treatment of you, my sweet?"

"There's nothing to forgive," she faltered, lips very near his. She raised her eyes, caught the flame of passion that lit his own, and closed them as, swiftly, his mouth came down and crushed her mouth with long, hungry kisses. No love supplicant this, but her master, the man who adored her, the man who forever should have the right to hold her so, to kiss her so.

Mercilessly he held her, and she responded. Together they clung, oblivious of place or of time, fulfilling that first golden moment of destiny, when heart goes out to heart, and the love bond is forged. His passion completely dominated her, making of her a thing of acquiescence, subservient to his will; and she gloried in her slavery, as she had hitherto gloried in being his prisoner. She could not have enough of his long, tempestuous kisses, giving him back caress for caress.

And then at last sanity came back to them; he released her slightly, and she stood against him, trembling with the passion that was spent.

Reverently now, he took her small hand in his, and kissed it.

"When will you marry me, my dearest dear?" he begged her. And his eyes beseeched: "Let it be soon!"

And as quietly now, she answered him:

"Are you sure, sure you want me?"

He took her face between his hands and kissed her forehead. And if his other kisses had aroused passion, the reverence of that salute brought a deep, all-abiding peace.

"Doesn't that convince you?" he asked huskily.

She nodded wordlessly, and turned to hide her happy, tear-drenched face upon his breast.

There was nothing to wait for now. They arranged to be married quite soon. Star knew a deep, unalloyed happiness; she lived in wondrous dream, out of which Derek, her most marvelous lover, assured her she would wake to find they were wedded lovers.

"The dream shall go on throughout your life, my very dear," he assured her. "Oh, Star, I never guessed it was possible to love one girl so much!"

Remembering his past attitude, sometimes she would gently chide him, tease him.

"Once you were brutal to me! You insulted me. Are you sure, sure, Derek, that you did not like me better in the rôle of a bad, bad girl?"

He caressed her hair.

"You are you, and therefore perfect," he answered.

She leaned against him, deeply content. Together they looked out over the calm waters, beneath the window. It was the hour they both loved very much, the after-dinner hour, when twilight fell and when the glow of sunset blended with the firelight.

STAR traveled back to New York, scene of her early business struggles, and chose her trousseau. Derek settled up his affairs. After they were married they were going to

South America to his coffee plantation, where he must spend at least two more years before he would be able to leave it in the hands of a manager. After that, the world was before them to do with as they pleased. They would not, Derek told her, be very wealthy, but they would have enough to live on.

And so everything was planned, and both supremely content. And to-night was the night before their wedding day!

Star was wearing a goldy velvet frock, and a long rope of golden beads. Her curly hair shone in the soft glow of the firelight, her cheeks were soft and flushed as a child's; never had her eyes seemed so starry. Against the milk-white skin of her throat two deep crimson roses were thrust with a jeweled pin through her corsage, and on the third finger of her left hand gleamed his ring—a true lover's knot in pearls and diamonds.

"Are you nervous of pearls?" he had asked when the ring was chosen. "I am not myself. Old-fashioned, perhaps—I like my girl to wear pearls. They are such soft, feminine things, less hard than diamonds."

"I, too, love pearls, though some one once told me that they signify tears," she had answered.

"Not for me," he responded confidently, kissing the finger that was to wear his ring; and before the warmth of his touch her superstitious fears melted away.

Now and then she would wonder at the tremendous change that had come over her life. That she, engaged to one brother and about to wed him, should have been taken by the other. And then all else was dispelled before Derek's tremendous love; a love the force of which almost frightened her at times.

And now he turned her to him, kissed, with the master touch of the lover, her soft perfumed arms, and the small dimples that lingered in the delicately turned wrists. And she, passive, lulled by love, let him do what he would; thrilling, thrilling as she felt the touch of his lips on her soft, fragrant skin.

The moment was perfect, and she wished it would continue forever.

And then the spell was broken by a sound on the polished floor behind them, by the sudden closing of a door. They both looked around, and instinctively Star broke away from Derek's arms.

"Roy!" she gasped.

STANDING regarding them, with a cynical twist on his young mouth, was indeed Roy Chalmers. His black eyes challenged Derek.

"You beast! You utter beast!" he muttered in a choked voice. "I wouldn't have believed any one capable of such a dastardly thing!"

Star's heart ached for him; she moved between the two men, for now Derek had risen, and there were dangerous lights in his eyes, too.

"Wait!" Star said with gentle dignity. "An explanation is undoubtedly due to you, dear," she said quietly, turning to Roy. "You know, of course, why your brother had you taken away as he did. He thought you in the toils of a vamp. He has explained it to me, and I have forgiven him. And after forgiveness, Roy, love came. Oh, my dear, you must not blame me. I loved you only as a sister might love a lonely, misguided brother!"

Still Roy's black eyes did not soften, his mouth maintained the selfsame hardness of line.

"Charming," he said cynically. "And all of it—lies!"

"Lies!" She looked proudly at him. "Derek could not, would not lie!"

"All of it is lies, lies!" shrieked the boy, pointing an accusing finger at his brother. "Ask him now, and see if what I say isn't true!"

Shaking with apprehension, sudden apprehension, Star turned to Derek.

"Derek," she whispered. "What does he mean?"

His voice trembling with suppressed anger, Derek began in a dangerously quiet voice:

"Hear me out, Star. Roy has got a little knowledge, and that is a dangerous thing. It is quite right that I have concealed something from you, but it was of no importance to our love."

"Not to yours, but to mine," broke in Roy hotly. "Remember — this girl gave me her love first, until you stole her from me. You did not kidnap her because you were afraid that I was in the toils of a vamp! You did it because you knew that, by the terms of our uncle's will, the one who wedded first got the major portion of his fortune. You knew it, and you were determined to hold it for yourself, never dreaming that a boy like me might dream of wedding before a man like you. It was for your own selfish ends that you robbed me of the only girl I ever really loved!" Shaking, he buried his face in his hands.

"Is this true?" demanded Star in a choked little voice.

Tight-lipped, Derek looked at her.

"You surely don't take the word of a boy like that before mine?" he rapped out.

"Is — is any of it true?" she demanded again.

"Some of it is; some isn't," he growled. "If Roy thinks he can win you from me by such means, he's vastly mistaken. I've got you, and I'm going to keep you."

Reverent kisses he gave her now

"Tell me the truth," she said piteously. "Do you benefit by this marriage with me?"

He hesitated. A look of ruthless determination came into his face.

"Are you going to accept his word against mine?"

"Tell me, tell me!"

"Very well, then. I do. But at the

time I kidnaped you I had no notion that I did!"

"Prove it," sneered Roy. "The knowledge was with our lawyer at that time. He had no reason for withholding it. I have just come from him."

Then his tone altered.

"Oh, Star, my very own, come back to me, and I swear you shall never regret it. He's a cad, who only loves you for selfish ends. He'll break you. He will master you—while I would only love you!"

IT was horrible, all of it, horrible. Star was torn two ways. Wanting to believe Derek, and yet with that terrible, haunting fear at her heart. And on the other hand, Roy, with shaking hands and working mouth; Roy, whom once she had vowed she would marry!

Suddenly Derek seemed to awake as from a trance. He caught Star brutally to him, bruising her soft flesh.

"You're not going to believe him, Star? You shan't—you can't! I tell you he's making it up to try to get you away from me. He's my brother, but Heaven help me, he doesn't know the meaning of the word truth. You can't trust yourself to him."

Her head fell back, tears of pain and anguish glistened on her eyelids.

"Who am I to believe?" she cried passionately. "Who is right? And who wrong?"

She suddenly felt very weary of being fought over. She began to feel she loathed the word love. Was it love that these two had for her? Love? Passion? Or had she really been more of a convenience than anything else?

She broke free from Derek's encircling arms and hid her burning face in her hands.

"Tell me the truth," she urged.

"Come with me, Star," beseeched Roy. "He sent me away to clear the ground for himself, I tell you. It was bluff, all that about my being in the toils of a wicked woman. True, I had known such a one, but that affair had been over and done with ages since. No, no, Derek knew the terms of the will and acted accordingly. Then, when he discovered you so attractive, he found it convenient to ask you to be his wife. It is all true. Come away with me, my darling, and give me the right to take care of you. We can be married at once."

She looked at him, took a step forward, faltered. She swayed where she stood.

"Are you really going to believe him?" ground out a voice behind her. "He's bluffing you, Star. Isn't my love, our love, worth faith?"

He leaped forward suddenly and seized her.

"What I have I hold," he told the boy, confronting him with blazing eyes. "You—get out!"

"Oh, Derek!" Star tried to struggle free. "You can't speak to him like that. He is your brother. Once he loved me!"

"Love!"—still holding her. "He doesn't know the meaning of the word in its truest sense!" He crushed her to him. "I shall not let you go."

"There speaks the master, the bully," sneered Roy, and something in his words taunted the girl. "He's just a bully, who wants his own way—always, Star. You'll regret it to your dying day if you stay with him!"

One last wild appeal Star made to Derek.

"Then swear none of what he says is true," she urged. "Swear it, and I will believe you!"

"If love won't set me right in your

eyes, nothing will," he replied. "I can't swear it, because there is some truth in what he says."

"You were going to marry me, knowing you would inherit a fortune by so doing?"

"If I did, it had nothing whatever to do with my wish for wanting to marry you."

"You see, it is true," said Roy, behind them. "At last he has owned up. What do you say now, Star?"

But Star was through—finished. In both their eyes she read desire, but in her wrought-up state she could not tell the false from the true. The gorge rose in her throat, choked her. Disillusioned, sick to death, she backed away from the pair facing her—from the man who would have dominated her; from the boy who beseeched her to hear only him.

"I'm through with you both," she cried, beside herself with pent-up emotion and distress. "Sick of love, of talk of marriage; do you hear? This is the end—the very end. To-morrow there will be no need for either of you to wrangle over me!"

BEFORE they could divine her intention, she had turned. In another second she had gained the entrance, hurled her frail weight against the door, and it had yielded.

A black night met her; a gale was rising, and the wind and water lashed against the sides of the rocks on which the house stood. Star ran down the path that led to the beach beneath. A boat rocked at anchor there, in the calmer water. Half a mile distant, across the bay, twinkled the lights of the ferry. If she could reach it, if she could make it, she could find shelter and ultimately a train to take her to New York—and oblivion!

She heard footsteps coming after her, and redoubled her efforts. She had the advantage of her pursuers. Yes, the boat was there, a small rowboat, with shipped oars. She sprang inside, grasped the oars, and, with her back to the ferry lights and her white face turned to the home wherein she had known such joy and sadness, Star began her perilous journey over the narrow neck of water toward that distant shore.

The wind was rising with every turn, and when ultimately she gained the open sea, unsheltered by the rocks whereon the house was built, she met its full fury. She realized acutely her awful danger. Her boat was tossed hither and thither like a cockle-shell. Impossible to make either for the landing stage, whence she had come, or for those distant lights, as she had hoped. She struggled vainly. The salt spray flung itself against her slender body, drenching her, blinding her eyes, while her hair knotted and tangled and her frail hands struggled impotently with the oars.

This was the end, she told herself. The end to her terrifying adventures, and a terrible end at that. Perhaps she would not care very much now she knew, or rather guessed, Derek was not all she thought him. After all, what did life matter when disillusion came?

Yet, doggedly, something of which she was almost unconscious made her cling tenaciously to life, mechanically righting the boat at intervals when it was all but sucked under by the tremendous forces against it.

"Star!"

Surely she knew that voice, borne to her faintly on the storm's violence? Out of the darkness it came:

"Star, Star! Hold hard! I'm coming, Star!"

Derek's voice. He had followed her, then, and found the boat gone; he was calling to her. Did he mean to try to effect her rescue? Was Roy with him? Would they both attempt to save her? Soon, soon it would be too late! Even now the boat was filling more rapidly than she, with the aid of the small can she found therein, could bail it out. No use to try.

"Star! Star!"

The voice drew nearer out of the darkness and above the raging storm. Was it her imagination? She had not thought they possessed another boat. How, then, was he coming?

Next moment, fighting the waves that threatened to engulf him, she knew what he had risked to save her. There had been no other boat, but he himself had plunged into that blackened sea and sought to reach her before she was out in the main stream. There came a swirling of water, and something dark clung to the edge of the boat.

"Help me up!" he muttered.

Obeying him silently, she did so. The next moment, with a gasp, he landed at her feet, only to shake himself like a rat, to push her unceremoniously out of the way, and to grasp the oars.

"Lie at the bottom; you'll be safer," he commanded. Then, fighting for their very lives, by expert seamanship and Star's aid in bailing, he managed to turn the little frail craft and bring it ultimately beyond reach of that raging torrent.

She was crying weakly when finally they grounded, and he made the boat fast without a word. Then he lifted her in his arms, and, striding over the shingles, made for the steps that led home.

She could feel his great heart pounding with his recent efforts as she lay against it, utterly spent, her tears mingling with the spray on her face. He strode into the house, up the broad staircase, and laid her on her bed. He gazed down at her, and his voice was curt and hard, his breathing labored, as he said:

"If you want to go away, you had better wait until to-morrow, and then you can do so in the proper manner. You nearly lost both our lives!"

She had been half fainting, but his curtness brought her back to hard realities. Her eyes opened, gazed at his beloved face beseechingly.

"Derek!" she whispered. "Oh, Derek, you risked your life for me. How can I ever thank you—be grateful enough?"

He drew himself up, a fine figure of a man in spite of soaking clothes and wild hair.

"I want neither your gratitude nor your thanks," he said sharply. "Earlier this evening I asked your trust, and you denied it me!" He paused. "Good night. To-morrow I shall make arrangements for your departure. In the meantime, I should advise you to get out of those clothes at once and have a hot bath!"

His tone stung her, but one more question she had to ask before she let him go:

"Where is Roy? Has he gone?"

His lips curled.

"Roy did just what I should have expected of him. His heroics vanished when your back was turned. Significant, isn't it, that, though he loved you so much, he dared nothing to save you? Roy has gone. As far as I am concerned, you can follow him and marry him as soon as you like. You are neither of you worth real effort or endeavor."

have known, to have guessed, you could never deceive me. Roy was lying, of course."

He laid aside the pipe that had long since spent itself, and stood up.

"And you have come here this morning to ask my forgiveness?" he inquired in an expressionless voice.

"Derek!" She swayed, steadied herself, for he made no attempt to touch her. Her lips twisted. His face had never been so dear as now, when she was looking on it for the last time. "Yes, I—could not go away without telling you I knew you to be speaking the truth. Can't you forgive me for doubting you? Won't you believe that I believe in you?"

His eyes held hers as in a vise, though his hands touched her not.

"I, too, was a fool last night," he said in the same level voice. "I prated on about belief. I don't want your belief. I only want your love!" He breathed quickly. "Heavens, you're beautiful!" He bent forward suddenly and kissed her full on the tiny pulse beating at her throat.

"Derek! Oh, Derek, what have you done?" She covered the imprint of that kiss with two shaking hands. Her eyes glowed in her white face. "Even though you hate me," she went on in a low, tense little voice, "don't drag down our love memory like that!"

At her tone something seemed to snap within him. His mouth softened, the light she dreaded vanished from his eyes, his hands came out, withdrew, shaking. They hung clenched at his sides. His gaze held that old, sweet longing for her that had so thrilled her.

"Don't go!" At last the words were wrung from him, and at them something warmed within the girl. "Don't go!" he repeated. Once more his arms went up, and she crept into them, looking up trustingly into his face.

"I do believe in you, Derek," she said in a clear voice. "I love you. I ask nothing better than to stay with you always!" She paused and, as his head bent, added: "Oh, my dear!"

Reverent kisses he gave her now—lover's kisses. The hate had gone, never to return; unbelief, too, had vanished with the morning sun. Forgiveness had come, and would never leave them.

At last some one tapped on the door. "What about your bag, miss?" asked a discreet voice. "The man's waiting."

"Tell them to bring it in again," commanded Derek in clear ringing tones. "When we go—we are going together. We've altered our plans."

And then, with a little, laughter-loving sound, he caught her to him again and kissed her lingeringly on her fresh young mouth.

Afterward, when the pain was a thing of the past, Derek explained everything to Star. Not until long after she had become his prisoner, and fiancée, had he learned the terms of his eccentric uncle's will—that the first to wed should have practically everything. (The first will had divided the fortune between them, but this will had been overruled by a later one.) Roy had, of course, used it as a lever to win Star back, mainly through jealousy and desire for revenge on a brother who had taken things so summarily into his own hands.

When they were married, since Roy was still unwed, Derek did inherit, but he passed half of it over to Roy.

"After all, what do we want with riches?" he said, looking into her love-radiant face. "You and I? We've enough of our own, haven't we, Star?"

And Star agreed with him.

party to-night will be dangerous only in one way."

"And that is?"

"Dangerous to my peace of mind!"

Doggedly Carol went on typing the list of attractive honeymoon trips at various prices. She felt that she hated all honeymooners. She yearned to box the ears of the next shy bridegroom who came into the office. Most of all, she wished she could stick a pin in Peggy Rogers!

Peggy was a pretty blond girl with fly-away curls and the sort of eyes that make men feel how big and strong they are. She had come to the Lorrie Travel Tours office just one week ago—and already she was one of the gang. A part of that inner circle which Carol regarded with longing, wistful eyes—from the outside. No one ever included Carol in anything. And the tragedy was, she didn't know why.

There wasn't anything particularly wrong with her looks. She had hair that was coal-black and sleek as a raven's wing. Her complexion was lovely. Her eyes were the dark sort of gray which appear almost black under stress. Long lashes fringed those straightforward, honest eyes. Longer lashes than Peggy's—but not half so effective. Carol hadn't had any practice fluttering them.

That was one thing to Carol's detriment. She was a trifle shy, and she didn't know how to attract attention to her good qualities. But Mary Sewell was apparently shy and retiring, too, and yet she was one of the most-sought-after girls in the office.

Carol had finally given up the riddle. But first she had tried all the things she read in books. She dressed as becomingly as she could in the prettiest clothes she could afford. She kept her voice low and sweet. She did exercises to keep supple. She brushed her hair a hundred strokes every night. She even took a course in "The Development of Personality" at the Y.

But that didn't do any good. How was any one going to: "Act interested in all the man does or says; listen and do not talk too much; project your personality into the silence," if no man said more than good morning to her?

"CAROL, do you know anything about Chinatown?"

Carol raised her head eagerly at Mary's casual words. She hoped Mary wouldn't notice that her eyes were blurred with tears. She could say she had a cold or something...

"Oh, yes, I go down often. Aren't the shops beautiful?" Maybe they were going to invite her to go on the party! Carol's heart beat so fast that it seemed to be racing out of her body.

"We're going down there on a party to-night." Mary paused. "I thought you might know some good place to dance. But I guess you wouldn't, at that." Mary strolled away.

Carol bent her head over the list and typed madly. Always like this. Her throat choked with sobs. She pounded the typewriter as though it had been a mortal foe.

"I beg your pardon. I wonder if you could tell me..."

Carol looked up. A tall man was standing by the counter. That was her first impression, his tallness. Next she noticed that his lean, tanned face was attractive; and that his blue eyes appeared more blue in contrast to the deep tan of his skin.

Len came forward, sleek and supercilious. He raised an eyebrow as he had seen his favorite screen actor do. "And what can we do for you, sir?" he asked suavely. He had one eye on

girl's tone, pitched low, but plenty loud enough to be audible to every one. Carol felt suddenly sorry for this chap who wanted a good time so badly he was taking this unconventional method of acquiring it.

"He's a stranger in town," she murmured.

He shot her a grateful glance, then turned back to Len. "I judge that you get some sort of commission on every tour that is booked out of this office?"

"Yes," said Len.

"Then you can book me for the most expensive one you've got. The one that goes to the ends of the earth, if necessary."

"Tour A?" suggested Len, all business. "That's a honeymoon that goes to Honolulu and China and the Phillipines and—"

"Excellent!" cut in the blue-eyed man. "And here's five hundred to bind the bargain." He drew out a wallet that was full of hundred-dollar bills and planked down five. Even Peggy looked impressed by that wallet.

"Now in addition to getting this commission from me, I want to foot all the bills on this party to-night—if you will let me join you."

Jack Lewis edged forward. "Delighted to have you, sir," he said cordially, kicking Len as he spoke. Jack was always broke.

"We'd like to show you Chinatown," conceded Len in a superior tone.

"Then that is all settled." The man smiled. "So if you will give me a receipt for my five hundred dollar deposit, I'll be on my way."

"When do you want to start on your trip?" asked Len, writing busily.

D. Joshua hesitated, and his keen eyes sought Carol's for a long instant. She felt her cheeks suddenly burn, she didn't know why.

"When is your next sailing?" he asked.

"There's one the first of next week. Wednesday. And another—"

"I'll sail Wednesday." He spoke decidedly, as if he had definitely made up his mind. "Reserve an outside room—for two, of course."

"In what name?" Len looked up.

"D. Joshua."

Peggy giggled and immediately smothered the giggle into a cough.

D. Joshua didn't notice. "Miss Travers can tell me where we will meet the rest of you," he said calmly. "I will call for her if she will allow me."

There was an electric silence. Carol's face went white, then red. Never had she felt more humiliated. "I'm not—" she began.

But Peggy was quicker. "You call for Miss Travers, Mr. Joshua," she said. "She'll give you all the dope on where we'll start out."

"Thank you." D. Joshua gave an impersonal smile to every one. "And what is your address, Miss Travers?"

In a daze, Carol told him.

"I'll call about eight," he said, putting down the address carefully in his notebook. "Good day," he added politely, and went out, shutting the door behind him.

"SANTA CLAUS!" cried Peggy. "In person! What do you know about that? Manna straight from heaven. And just at the end of the month, too, when you boys were wondering whether you'd have to hock your shirts!" She turned to Carol. "Gosh, Miss Travers, you must have vamped him! And in about five minutes, too. A fast worker you turned out."

was starting on a honeymoon to China on Wednesday. Her heart contracted with a strange hurt.

"What's the matter?" he questioned swiftly.

"I was just wondering . . ." Her voice trailed off into silence. "Your fiancée, where does she live?" She made a new start.

She kicked out, and at the same time screamed

"That's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. There isn't any fiancée, you see. I'm not engaged to any one. Not any one in this world." His voice bore the ring of sincerity.

"Oh!" A tight band that had been pressing in about Carol's heart loosened. Her heart began to triple its beat. The room seemed suddenly close, suffocating. She could hardly draw her breath.

"Mr. Sears took it for granted that I was a bridegroom-elect when I stuttered and stammered. That helped my plans a lot, so I didn't correct him."

"But—the honeymoon trip you engaged . . ." gasped Carol.

"I may go on a honeymoon — if everything goes right." He was gazing straight at Carol as he spoke. Those compelling eyes of his held hers as in a vise. She trembled. She tried to think of something to say, but she couldn't. A burning flame of feeling enveloped her.

"I knew you were the girl for me, the minute I saw you," said Don slowly. "That sounds absurd, and I know you'll think I'm crazy. But it's true. I've been dreaming about you all my life. Finding you in the flesh was like meeting an old friend out of a book, come to life. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Carol. "Yes, I see!" She had forgotten that she was ever shy and tongue-tied. She had forgotten everything in the world, except that at last she knew the real meaning of love. This devastating sensation which swept over her was love. She knew that now.

"I wouldn't tell you this, only—

something may happen to me to-night. I wanted you to know. Just in case . . ."

"S o m e t h i n g—happen?" Carol forced the words out of stiff lips.

"Probably nothing will happen. I can't explain to you, but that man who jostled me at the door as we came in was—was a friend of mine. He gave me a message."

Carol sat like a statue. She was remembering what Mr. Lorrie had said. It all fitted in. What if the man to whom she had given her heart wasn't worthy? What if he were—a criminal?

Don was talking on. "I'd thought that joining this party of merry-makers might cloak my—my activities to-night. But word has leaked out, somehow. So I can't jeopardize any of you. There may be danger. You'd—"

THE rest came back just then, joking and laughing.

"I'm sorry," said Don immediately. "But something has come up . . . I'll have to leave you."

"Oh, Santa Claus, don't go!" wailed Peggy.

"The big excitement is going to happen later," urged Jack. "You know we're going on a regular tour through Chinatown. Real stuff."

"Sorry," said Don as he paid the check.

"Would it help for us to be along with you?" questioned Carol swiftly.

He hesitated a moment. "No," he said, but Carol knew he was lying. She turned to the rest.

"I don't know what it's all about," she said. "But Mr. Joshua is going to have some sort of adventure to-night and he's afraid there'll be danger for us. That's why he wants to leave. But I'm all keen for a thrill. How about the rest of you?".

There was a shout of approval.

Don shook his head. "This danger is real," he told them.

"Well, so are we!" they chimed in. "Tell us the plot of the piece and we'll do anything to help."

"That's just it," he answered slowly. "I can't tell you. That's why it's impossible for me to let you run into danger blindly. I—"

"You can't get rid of us now!" Peggy got up and shrugged into her coat. "We're going, so you might as well save your breath. What do you want us to do?"

Don smiled. "Act like a bunch of crazy kids out for a Chinatown lark!"

"That's easy," said Jack. "Act natural!"

Don's grin broadened. "You've got the idea." He sobered. "But you must look out for trouble at all times, and if any shooting comes, duck flat." He handed a small object to Len. "Here's a police whistle. Don't blow that unless it's absolutely necessary. Last resort. Understand?"

"Do I?" cried red-headed Len. "Oh, boy!"

"We won't use your guide," went on Don. "But one of my own. Shall we go now?"

"Say, we mustn't forget that we're to pick up Mr. Lorrie at Sing Fat's," said Peggy. "Gosh, we'll have to hurry. It's almost ten now."

A mask seemed to shut down over Don's face. "Mr. Lorrie is coming?" he asked swiftly.

Carol explained. Don seemed to hesitate. "I'll meet you in the shadow of St. Mary's, across the street," he said. "You—you might say that I've gone on home. I don't want any one to know that I'm in Chinatown to-night."

But Mr. Lorrie didn't come. They lingered in the lee of Sing Fat's brilliantly-lighted emporium until five minutes past the hour. Chinatown was shrouded in fog. Only the street lights —picturesque lanterns in this block— shone out, making little pools of light against the white of the fog. Chinamen shuffled by. New China boys and girls, clad in American garb, went giggling on their way. The little cable cars crawled merrily up and down steep California Street, jangling their bells in salute as they passed one another.

The lighted clock on old St. Mary's was only a blur in the mist.

Don wasn't a criminal. He never would have given Len the police whistle if he had been. But she couldn't help worrying . . .

"He said to go on, if he wasn't here right on time. Let's go," said Peggy, with a shiver. "This fog gets in my bones."

"Let's go!" shouted Jack. "We're off to see the sights of Chinatown."

Peggy giggled. The rest tried to play up. It was a bit difficult to pretend, when they had been assured that danger lurked in this narrow, fog-shrouded street. But they did their best.

"If you people want to see Chinatown right, Sam Wong will show it to you," said Don heartily. Carol couldn't be sure, but she thought the stooped Chinaman was the same man who had picked up Don's dollar bill a couple of hours before.

"I mebbe so shlow you plenny. Fi' dlollar," answered the Chinese in a singsong voice.

"All right. You're on," said Don as he handed him something. The rest didn't notice, but Carol's eyes, sharpened by love, saw that it wasn't a five-dollar bill which changed hands, but a small sheet of note paper. Then this *was* the same man! Don's confederate —this horrible Chinaman . . . Carol's heart seemed to stand still.

DON and the Chinaman started down California Street. The rest followed hastily, slipping and sliding on the steep street. They turned north on Stockton Street and went a block, then climbed the hill again, until they reached an alley. Carol's heart was thundering excitedly. What lay just around the corner?

From one of the narrow buildings floated out the high wail of a Chinese fiddle, accompanied by the unaccented beat of a hollow-sounding drum.

Their Chinese guide dived into a small aperture in the wall. Don took Carol's arm and held it close by his side.

"The rest of you follow Sam Wong," he said. "We'll come last." Instantly they obeyed, all keeping well together.

They entered a narrow, winding passageway. There was barely room for two to walk abreast. A penetrating, earthy odor smote their nostrils. Peggy giggled nervously.

"Buried alive in two reels," she called out.

"Aw, shut up!" came Len's voice.

Peggy gave a little squeak of fear. "Oh, I'm falling!" she cried.

"It's just some stairs. Don't be scared, Miss Peggy," Don called to her.

"My error!" Peggy called back jauntily enough, but her voice sounded scared just the same.

The flight of stairs was short. It brought them to another long alley, still more dimly lighted. Then they climbed up, then down again, until Carol was completely turned around.

"How did you happen to know

that?" asked Carol as they walked along. "I thought you were a stranger in town."

Don hesitated. "Wong tipped me off," he said at length. Carol was sure he was lying. But why?

They passed several closed doors. Finally Sam Wong stopped in front of a door that was sagging on its hinges. "We go," he said and pushed against the bottom panel.

It creaked, but did not give. Twice he pushed, then he rapped and called something in Chinese. After a pause and a sound of scurrying inside, there was an answer in a girl's voice and the door swung wide. Sam Wong entered and they all trooped in after him, chattering and laughing. They were ready and willing to enjoy everything and be properly fooled, but they didn't intend to let things frighten them any longer.

A small boy and a half-grown girl, dressed in ornate Chinese garb, stared straight ahead, with uncaring expressions in their almond-shaped eyes. An old, half-blind hag peered at the party curiously, then she turned to the children and said something in a sharp voice.

Immediately they began to sing with shrill, queer tones that were an assault to Western ears.

Peggy giggled and Carol smothered an impulse to put her hands over her ears.

With scarcely a pause for breath, the two children sang three songs—if such they might be called. Then the old crone thrust out her yellow hand. "Moneys!" she demanded.

All the boys fished around in their pockets until they found coins. The old Chinese woman didn't vouchsafe any thanks. She thrust the money into a green dish on the table and turned her back on them.

"Let's go. This show is pretty dull," said red-haired Len with a yawn.

BUT Don was still looking for a coin in his pocket. He found a quarter at last, and drew it forth with a triumphant air. At the same time something dropped and rolled across the floor.

"My lucky piece!" he cried aloud. "I can't lose that!" He knelt down and began to search, running his hands rapidly over the crude flooring of the room. Carol watched him for a second, then she touched his shoulder.

"It rolled over there! See?"

He didn't seem to hear. His fingers were digging into the floor. With frantic haste he worked away. The old woman shrieked something in staccato Chinese, and leaped to her feet. Carol cried a horrified warning and Don ducked, just in time. A sharp knife went deep into the floor beside him.

"Put-up stuff, I'll bet!" cried Len joyously. "But it sure has pep!" He caught the old woman's arm as she raised it again, another knife clutched in her yellow fingers.

"Don't play so rough!" he admonished her as he took away the weapon.

"Ah!" Don's fingers had caught on something. He brought up a little block of wood. Under that was an iron ring. Quickly he grasped the ring, and tugged with all his might.

"Ducky!" said Peggy delightedly. "A trapdoor! That's all we needed to make the evening complete. Mr. Joshua, you're a simply perfect host. It was dear of you to give us a thrill when we started out, by promising adventure. And . . . "

She stopped short, her mouth comically open. Mr. Lorrie was climbing up out of the room below!

He looked at them. "I thought you'd come here. I counted on this," he said in a queer, hurried tone. "You're in the hands of a desperate criminal. I don't know what he wanted to gain by bringing you all down here. Maybe he wanted to kill you!"

Peggy gasped.

"But whatever was his motive, I've forestalled him! Len, tie him up with this!" He tossed a length of rope to Len. The boy gazed stupidly at it. "Tie him, I say!" thundered Mr. Lorrie.

Len made an uncertain step toward Don, but Don was quicker. He yanked an automatic out of his pocket and leveled it at Mr. Lorrie. "Hands up!" he commanded.

Mr. Lorrie put up his hands with a smile.

Shuffling feet sounded from the narrow passageway. Don caught his breath sibilantly.

"Quick, Carol!" he cried. "If you love me, take this chance. While I hold them off, go down into that room and tell me what you see. I must have a witness or all my work is lost." He never once took his eyes from the little group of astounded people in front of him.

Carol wavered. A crook . . . The man she had given her heart to was a desperate criminal who would stop at nothing. She shuddered.

"Carol!" His voice came to her in swift command.

Without stopping to consider further, she scrambled down the little ladder which led to the room below. Her heart was thundering. Her hands were clammy with fear. But she obeyed the agonized plea in Don's voice.

She found herself in a very small room. Two frightened Chinese were hard at work destroying something which looked like a printing press. Another Chinaman was setting fire to a stack of papers in the far corner of the room. One of the bits of paper fluttered free and came to rest almost at Carol's very feet. Without thinking, she stooped and picked it up. She gasped. She held a brand new fifty-dollar bill in her hand!

Her quick intake of breath was heard by the tallest Chinaman, the one who was pounding the machinery to bits with a big hammer. He whirled at the sound and came toward Carol with the hammer upraised.

For a second she stood still and stared with eyes distended with horror. Then, suddenly alive to her danger, she turned and grabbed the ladder. With a single, lithe movement she jerked herself to the third rung. But she was too late. Something grasped her ankle. She shrieked aloud.

As if in answer came the loud note of a police whistle repeated again and again. She heard thudding feet above, and the sound of blows, then the sharp *ping* of a revolver.

She shrieked again and kicked with her free foot at the Chinaman. Surprised, he loosed his grasp and they both landed in a heap on the floor. Instantly Carol scrambled up and backed against the wall. She was so frightened that she had no further power of coherent thought. She closed her eyes . . .

THE noise of some one coming down the ladder made her eyes fly open again. It was Don, and behind him was a man in police uniform.

"Are you all right, dearest?" Don had her tight in his arms. She tried to nod, but she was trembling so that

she could only cling to him and sob out her fright.

"Tough luck!" said the man in uniform. "After all your work, Wells, they destroyed the evidence." He was examining the printing press.

"If I'd only been quicker!" Don lamented. "I didn't foresee that Lorrie would be here. I didn't think he'd have the nerve."

"He out-thought you that time. It was he who gave the command to these Chinks to destroy the presses. They never would have thought that up by themselves... How I hate going up and letting him know he's outwitted us again!"

Don sighed. He looked down at Carol. She wiped her eyes free of tears and looked back at him. She didn't have her handkerchief, so she unconsciously used what she had been clutching all this time, the new, crisp, fifty-dollar bill.

Don gave a whoop of joy and almost tore the money from her grasp. "Where did you get this?" he asked tensely.

"Why—it blew out of the stack of papers the Chinaman was burning," she answered wonderingly.

"What?" roared the police officer. He in turn took the money. Solemnly he shook hands with Don. "That 'll put that fellow behind bars!" he said heartily. "Thanks to the young lady. Come on now, and watch me nab him!"

Don carried Carol up the ladder in his arms. She gloried in his strength.

A group of frightened Chinese, including the old hag and the two children, huddled in one corner of the room. So did Peggy, closely infolded in Len's arms, and Mary, weeping in Jack's embrace. So did Mr. Lorrie, smiling that queer smile of his. Determined police officers were menacing them with businesslike revolvers.

"Oh, are you all right, Carol?" piped Peggy.

No one paid any heed. They were all watching the police officer slip handcuffs on Mr. Lorrie's well-manicured hands.

"But—but—" he sputtered. "What's the charge, officer?"

"Manufacturing fifty-dollar bills. Counterfeiting! We have the Chinamen who did the actual work for you. Clever idea to pick out Chinese, who are notably patient and skilled workmen, to make your dies! We have the broken presses that you ordered destroyed—and we have one of the fifty-dollar bills that escaped the flames. So the game is up, Lorrie!"

Mr. Lorrie shrugged. "Well, you will admit it was a great racket while it lasted," he grinned.

"Sure. Running a travel bureau where your unsuspecting clerks made change with the spurious money. One time you'd make tens, another time fives... Most of your victims were abroad by the time they passed the money and usually it was accepted without question. A great idea, Lorrie. But it's all finished now."

The police chief turned to Don and saluted.

"Fine work, Wells. Glad to have been associated with you on this." He and Don shook hands, then he hustled Mr. Lorrie and the Chinese out of the place, followed by the rest of the policemen.

Peggy gave a huge sigh. "What an evening!" she cried. "Say, who the heck are you, Santa Claus? I'm all a-twitter to know."

Don grinned. "Don Joshua Wells," he answered. "Hard to have a middle name like Joshua, isn't it?"

Len looked enviously at him. "Secret Service, I suppose?"

Don nodded. "I've been on the trail of Lorrie for about six months. Finally tied up the travel bureau with his activities, so I wandered in there to see what it was like."

"So you didn't want a honeymoon cruise after all," said Peggy.

"I didn't when I walked into your travel bureau this morning—but I do now!"

"Oh—oh! I see." Peggy turned to the rest. "What do you say we breeze along and leave the love-birds alone?" she asked pertly.

Don grinned. "Thanks a lot for your help. All of you. You'll hear from me soon. And you'll find a cop outside the door who will show you the way to the street again."

"Good night!" they called.

DON waited until their footsteps had died away, then he turned to face Carol.

"This is a dingy place to propose marriage to the one girl in the world," he said uncertainly. "But I can't wait another minute. You're such a brave, wonderful, marvelous girl, Carol dear. I'm afraid if I let you get out of my sight for a minute you'll disappear—back into the land of dreams."

Carol was trembling, but this time it wasn't with fear. "I—won't—disappear," she whispered.

He caught her close and pressed his lips to hers in a long kiss.

"I love you so, little sweetheart," he whispered. "It's absurd to think that you could have come to care for me in this short time, but—I adore you!"

Carol gave him a wavering smile. "Why is it absurd?" she asked.

"Darling!" He kissed her until she was breathless.

On Wednesday, two of the happiest people on board the S. S. Malola were Mr. and Mrs. Don J. Wells. They were on a honeymoon tour to Hawaii. Carol wouldn't go to China. She had smiled at Don with the provocative manner that was so easy—once you knew how, as she said:

"I've been arranging honeymoons for other people for ages. Don't I get a chance to arrange my own?"

"Route us anywhere you like!" said the infatuated Don, kissing her. "A trip to Paradise it will be—no matter where we go. So long as you are along." And he kissed her again.

"That's where we are going," said Carol, dreamily content in his arms. "To Paradise!"

The Love Line

By Marjorie Gleyre

It took a little bird to show her the way to loveland

"Did you get one too?" she demanded

GIGGLES—who had been christened Vera, but was nicknamed "Giggles" after a pronounced characteristic — stood in the doorway of the Blue Bird Tea Room impatiently tapping first one foot and then the other, while she gazed down the street to see if her chums were coming. When they appeared at the corner, Victoria and Lily together, she rushed to meet them; for she simply could not wait until they came up.

"Did you each get one?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Yes!" they both assented, linking arms with her and continuing to the tea room which was their favorite meeting place.

"Who would have thought that Helene was a Van Alstyne?" sighed Lily, as they slid into their chairs at their accustomed little blue table by the window.

"She was so reserved."

"She warmed up to us, though."

"After she said she would invite us to her dance, I never gave it another thought," remarked Victoria.

"When I got the invitation this morning it nearly laid me out," added Giggles, with her usual irrepressible giggle.

Each of the girls reached into her hand bag and extracted a square white card on which was engraved an invitation to a formal dance to be given at

the Van Alstyne mansion on fashionable Holt Street. The invitation was from Helene Van Alstyne—that same Helene who had attended the lecture course on psychology at the club with them—yet almost a different Helene, in view of her suddenly disclosed identity!

They had not heard her last name, and it had all been so informal that no one bothered with last names, anyway. The quiet and unassuming girl had seemed to take a fancy to the three friends, and when they parted at the end of the course, had remarked that she did not want to lose track of them and added casually that she would send them invitations to a dance she was planning to give.

"You don't suppose," exclaimed Giggles rapturously, "that that perfectly stunning Van Alstyne boy is Helene's brother?"

"The one whose picture you cut out every time it is in the paper for winning a tennis or golf match?" queried Victoria with interest.

"How thrilling!" breathed Lily.

"Oh, girls, girls!" sighed Giggles. "How can we ever act up to the Van Alstynes?"

Victoria drew her brows together in a thoughtful frown. "It's not like anything we've ever been to," she said; "it 'll be much swankier and we'll have to be swank, too."

"And how!" agreed Giggles.

"We ought to get a 'line' that's appropriate," mused Lily. "A line that's smart enough for the Van Alstynes."

"I tell you what," exclaimed Victoria brightly, "if we just act up to our clothes—"

"Oh, a clothes-line!" giggled Vera.

"I don't think most people have recovered from the short skirts and boyish bobs," continued Victoria. "We still act too free and easy. The new clothes are so soft and feminine, with their long clinging lines. They suggest elegance and sophistication. Now, if we act the way the clothes seem to demand—sort of distingué—I think we'll go over big!"

"Ye-ah!" agreed Giggles, with a nod of approval, "that'll be our line—elegance! But how'll we do it?"

"Practice," said Victoria. "Let's see," she consulted her card, "the dance is not until the eighteenth. We have plenty of time to learn our line."

"I move we all go to my house now," said Giggles, "and start practicing the new line at once."

"Of course, necking is out," decreed Lily.

"Oh, pshaw!" from Giggles. "Don't they neck on Holt Street? But I suppose our new line is more dignified—sort of old-fashioned like the handsome cavalier kissing the fair lady's hand."

"Sort of," said Victoria pensively, "but I wouldn't call it old-fashioned. I think it's ultra-modern."

AN hour later they were in Vera's room, gliding across the floor in what they took to be a manner of elegance, practicing greeting each other, acknowledging an invitation to dance, and posturing before the mirror.

"How's this?" demanded Giggles, holding out her hand and simpering, "I've seen your picture in the papers, Mr. Van Alstyne."

"That's Giggles's 'love line,'" cried Victoria, mischievously.

Vera giggled, and both her friends jumped on her at once.

"Giggling won't go," reproved Lily. "You'll have to cut that out."

"Oh," sighed Giggles, "that's the hardest thing I'll have to do."

During the days that followed the

three girls worked assiduously to acquire smartness. They also frequented beauty parlors to make their appearance as perfect as possible. They haunted the stores until they found dresses that seemed the last word in sophistication.

The new line was becoming enough to the rather stately Victoria whom no one would ever think of calling "Vic." and to the languid Lily. But poor Giggles was a misfit. She tried to assume a dignity and distinction which ill became her jolly, irrepressible nature. She was the kind of girl whose charm lay in her naturalness; when she tried to be other than herself, she not only smothered her charm, but became very nearly a caricature!

"MY name—Heaven forgive my parents!—is C. Fitzgerald Van Alstyne," said Helene's brother, as he guided Giggles around the dance floor.

"C.?" she questioned, trying desperately to control the beating of her heart which had been furiously irregular ever since her handsome hero had requested a dance.

"Ssh!" He bent his head to whisper in her ear, "Clarence—but call me Fitz. And you?"

"Vera Brooke Wareham." She gave it all because she fancied that a full name sounded distinguished.

"And I may call you—" he prompted, with a coaxing look.

What she almost replied was, "You may call me Giggles—but that doesn't mean I'll come," which would have been quite Gigglesque. But she bit it back in time, and said primly: "You may call me Vera, if you like."

He looked disappointed, but as she had her eyes languidly cast down, she did not notice it. She was hoping and praying with all her might that she could make an impression. Never had she wanted so intensely to be liked. For Fitz seemed to her all that his pictures had promised, and more. No other man in her experience had affected her the way this young society prince did.

He treated her with a manner of such perfect equality that she wondered if he was aware she did not live on Holt Street—did not even live at that end of town. It must be her line—the patiently acquired elegance was doing its work!

She envied Fitz his breeziness and unrestraint, wishing with her whole heart that she could let go, and just be herself, too. But whereas that might be very well for a man, she knew it would never do for a girl—not in society! So she redoubled her efforts to "live up to the Van Alstynes," determined to charm this fascinating scion of the house.

"You're a great little dancer," said Fitz enthusiastically.

"Yes?" she murmured with a languorous glance up at him. "Dancing is such a pleasure with the right partner." Mentally she patted herself on the back, for both the words and the manner, because her temptation had been to giggle and say, "You shake a wicked heel yourself!"

"Am I the right partner?" he insinuated.

She gave him an arch look, but made no reply. They danced in silence until the end of the number when Vera's next partner claimed her. She hoped that Fitz would cut in, but she saw nothing of him till later on when his next program dance with her came around. It was a waltz and they danced like one person, so perfectly that neither of them felt the need of talking.

Fitz suggested refreshments.

"Could you care for an ice?"

"I think it would be very refreshing," she said precisely, and laid two fingers gracefully on his arm as they went off. He looked irritated for a second, but she did not notice it and the next moment he had managed a pleasant smile.

After that he cut in during the dance numbers several times, and her heart began to sing within her.

"May I see you home?" he requested as the dance neared its end.

"I'd be charmed," she acceded with the most gracious smile in her repertoire. She had practiced that smile in front of the mirror, and knew the exact angle at which to tilt her head, precisely how far to lift her eyebrows, and just how much of her upper teeth to reveal. It's a knockout, she had assured herself, when she had it mastered. But now she was disappointed in its effect. Fitz seemed to turn away without responding to its charm at all.

At her door Fitz took her hand and gave it a gentle pull toward him while his expression plainly demanded a kiss. The neighborhood is affecting him, she thought, he doesn't think I know how to act Holt-Street. So she raised her hand and offered it to his lips. He laughed, cried "you win!" and brushed his mouth lightly across it.

And Giggles lay awake half the night wishing she could have kissed him! She had never wanted a kiss from any one so much in her life. This new line was not all to the good, she reflected sadly.

WHEN Fitz returned from taking Vera home, he saw a light under Helene's door, and tapped lightly on the panel in the rhythm that had been their private signal since childhood. His sister was sitting up in bed reading.

"I couldn't get to sleep," she explained.

He closed the door quietly, tiptoed across the room and let his tall figure sprawl on the chaise longue, hands clasped comfortably behind his head and legs crossed.

"Which girl did you tell me was called Giggles, and acted like a cut-up?" he inquired lazily. "The one you said I'd be crazy about?"

"The one with the dark curly hair—Vera Wareham."

He shook his head incredulously. "Can't believe it! She's an affected little prig—I can't imagine calling her Giggles."

"I don't know what's got into her," confessed Helene. "I hardly knew her to-night myself. That's not a bit the way she used to be at the lecture course. Why, she had us in stitches all the time, she was so genuinely funny—"

"Can't imagine it!" he repeated. "She's the most artificial little thing I've seen in a long time. Every move is a pose. Even her expressions look as if she practiced them in front of a mirror. Except sometimes, when you get a look into her eyes—"

"It's very queer that she should suddenly be so different."

"I was going to drop her after the first dance," he confessed, "but she dances awfully well—just suits my stride. First thing I knew I was cutting in on her. I have a feeling that somewhere under that affectation there's a girl I'd like to know."

His eyes were thoughtful.

"Oh, you'd have adored her at the lecture course!"

He shrugged. "Well, she interests me. I think I'll follow her up a bit.

She's just the type I like, as far as looks go."

IN the morning—or rather about noon—Victoria and Lily appeared at Vera's house bubbling over with eagerness to compare notes about the evening. The room rang with "he-saids" and "I-saids." Victoria had charmed a red-headed youth and had been charmed herself; while Lily seemed to have had the usual luck of a blonde!

"How did you make out with Van Alstyne?" they demanded of Giggles.

She rolled her eyes rapturously "He's simply precious. I think I've fallen in love at last. He wants to see me again—going to give me a ring."

"Gracious me!" teased Lily. "Has it gone that far already?"

Giggles blushed hotly. "You know what I mean! On the phone. Gee! I hope I can keep up my line!"

"We really did put it over, didn't we?" rejoiced Victoria. "I think we were every bit as—as patrician as any one there."

The more she saw of Fitz the more wildly in love Vera fell, and the harder she worked the line. And the more Fitz saw of her the more interested he became.

At first she puzzled him a lot; he could not understand her at all. But as he saw her more often he began to suspect that her painful smartness was more of a disguise than a persistent affectation. There were times when her real nature asserted itself before she could crush it. And though she acted twice as sophisticated afterwards, the slip had registered.

There was the time he took her to dinner before a show. She was ravenously hungry, but managed to restrain herself and dally daintily with the food, even while planning a raid on the ice box when she got home.

But Fitz began to discuss a book they had both read, and she got so interested in arguing about whether the heroine had an inferiority complex or not that when the dessert was set before her she forgot her line and reverted to nature! She cast a contemplative glance from the pudding to the spoon and fork which were beside her plate; then grasping the spoon in one fist and the fork in the other she fixed a glassy stare on Fitz and murmured:

"When in doubt watch your host."

He looked completely taken by surprise and as if he wanted to burst into hilarious laughter, but did not quite dare. While Giggles, with a sickening realization of her slip, stiffened up at once, and uttered a perfectly banal comment on the orchestra's playing in her most blasé manner.

At the show afterward she took care to act a bit bored, which was very hard to do because she had such a huge capacity for enjoyment that she liked to get a lot of fun out of everything. It was a clever comedy, too. And at one specially comical speech her famous giggle came bubbling out. But as Fitz turned to look at her inquiringly she managed to turn it into a cough, and then to yawn just a tiny bit.

"Shall we walk home?" he asked when they got outside and could draw a good breath of the fresh night air.

"Walk?" she repeated with a surprised lift of her eyebrows. "At night?" She wondered with an uncomfortable feeling of worry whether she had not played her rôle properly that he should make such a suggestion. Surely none of the Holt Street crowd walked home from a theater at night!

"Taxi!" called Fitz, without arguing the point.

She felt reinstated in his opinion, but as she sat on her side of the taxi in a graceful pose suggesting slight weariness, she wished that Fitz's manner of friendly attention would warm into something more ardent. Taxis offered such boundless opportunities.

But they reached their destination, and Fitz left her at her door with the customary kiss of her hand which he had given her ever since that first night. It was a gallant and chivalric gesture—but after all a cold one. How long did Holt Street people have to know one before they got around to kissing, she pondered, or was it simply that Fitz did not want to kiss her?

He was all she had hoped. But—was he falling for her?

"HOW are you making out with Fitz?" Victoria asked Giggles one day.

Vera looked a little uncomfortable. "I don't know," she confessed. "I see him on an average of three times a week and he's awfully sweet to me, but I don't seem to be making much headway."

"You haven't slipped up, have you?" queried Lily anxiously.

Giggles shook her head. "I've been so polished I was afraid even my nose would shine." She sighed ruefully.

"I've even made openings for him in case he's shy. But he doesn't act shy about other things. So I don't know—I just don't know—"

"Maybe he's the kind that takes a long time to make up his mind," Lily consoled her.

"I wish he'd hurry up. I'm losing sleep and weight and everything over it. I'm so mad about him I want to jump in his lap and rumple his hair and kiss him all over his face. And instead—"

"Instead, what?" prompted Victoria.

"Oh," she giggled a little, "I let him kiss my hand."

"Are you going to act like that all the rest of your life?" asked Lily curiously. "If he takes you for truly that kind of a person and marries you, you'll have to keep on being like that, won't you?"

Giggles looked startled. "Gee!" she groaned. "If Fitz wasn't so precious I'd never consider it. But after I'm married to him maybe I can gradually work out of it."

But it began to look as if she never would be married to C. Fitzgerald Van Alstyne. For though he continued to take her out, he was as far from popping the question as ever.

He spoke to Helene about it once.

"Say, Sis," he petitioned, "can't you say something to her? If she'd take off her high hat I'd propose in a minute. But if what I'm getting now is a sample of what I'll get for the rest of my life—why, I don't want it."

"What can I say?"

"Give her the razz."

For Fitz's sake Helene tried to broach the subject to Vera when she had a few minutes alone with her at a tea.

"The nickname we used to call you at the lectures isn't very appropriate any more," she began diffidently.

"You mean I don't giggle?" said Vera, highly pleased. "You've noticed that?"

"Yes. I'd hardly know you were the same person," Helene hurried on. "You see, you used to be so full of pep—" She hesitated wondering how to draw a tactful comparison in favor of the way Vera used to be, when Vera interrupted apologetically:

"Yes, I used to be rather rowdy, didn't I? But that was just a passing phase," she added complacently.

"I wanted to tell her that what she had done was to lose all her personality," Helene told Fitz later, "but she seemed so pleased with herself that I simply couldn't say another thing."

ONE day Giggles answered the phone to be greeted by Fitz's voice. A warm rapture swept through her, as always when he called her. She had seen nothing of him for over a week, so this was doubly thrilling as she had begun to fear she had lost him.

"My firm is sending me out of town for a month or so," he announced, "and I want to know if I can come over to tell you good-by to-night."

"Yes, of course," she acceded, feeling as if her heart had turned right over at the prospect of not seeing him for a month.

"I've got a little present for you—"

"Why, Fitz! How delightful!" she managed to say calmly enough, though the erratic heart turned another somersault.

All afternoon she speculated on that present. Could it possibly be a ring? Was it going to happen at last? Perhaps he did not want to go away without making her his. Spurred by these

pleasing thoughts she practiced quite a while before the mirror to make sure that her manner was up to the mark. She even tried holding out her hand with the proper finger extended.

Then she said "Gee!" and did a tap step across the room—which would have won Fitz's heart on the moment, could she have known it!

She dressed for what she hoped would be the momentous occasion with the utmost care, selecting a soft draped gown of burned orange. Her coiffure and manicure, to say nothing of her make-up, were the work of an artist!

"Don't we look sweet!" Fitz greeted her breezily.

He looked at her admiringly, and if she had given him a little natural encouragement she would have had him right then. But instead she leaned back against the door in one of her most practiced attitudes of easy grace.

He carried a large square package that somehow filled her with misgiving. If that was his present, there was no chance of its being a ring!

"Here's a little remembrance of yours truly," he announced, removing the wrapping. "Just a little something to remember me by while I'm gone."

There sat a parrot in a cage, cringing against the side wires in evident fright. Fitz grinned wickedly at Vera's startled expression; but despite her surprise she was able to say graciously:

"What a charming and original gift," while she bit back at the "what's the big idea?" that trembled on the end of her tongue.

"Glad you like it."

"Pretty Poll," she cooed into the cage. "Does it talk?"

"He sure does. And he knows his onions," replied Fitz emphatically. "But he's shy, and probably won't say anything until he gets well acquainted with you. When he does talk, be sure to listen—each word is a pearl. Eh, Rosy?"

"Rosy?" she ejaculated.

"Yes, I call him Rosy—it's short for Rosary—on account of the pearls!"

Giggles permitted a tinkling laugh. "How cute of you, Fitz!" she appreciated.

She tried to coax Rosy to show off, but he persisted in cowering in one corner of the cage, and Fitz assured her she would have to be patient and let time have its effect.

The evening from which she had hoped so much turned into a dismal failure. Fitz did not indicate in any way that he cared more than a friend would care for her. But as he was leaving he said:

"I wonder if you'll care to see me when I get back," and he cast a significant glance at Rosy.

"Why shouldn't I?" she rejoined. "Just give me a ring—" At that she remembered how the girls teased her for saying that, and she blushed vividly.

"Perhaps I will," he said with a quizzical smile.

THOUGH Giggles lavished a good deal of attention on Rosy, he retained his shy reticence through the days that followed.

"I bet Fitz was kidding you," surmised Victoria, "and Rosy doesn't speak at all!"

Giggles sighed miserably. "A dumb bird for a present—when I expected a ring! That last evening I thought my manner was simply too finished—and he didn't fall for me at all. I guess I can't make the grade—I'm a flop."

"Come on down to the *Renée Beauty Parlor* and get a marcelle and

a manicure and you'll feel like a new woman," advised Lily.

"And while Fitz is away," suggested Victoria practically, "we'll all get our heads together and see if we can find out what's cramping your style."

So one afternoon they gathered at Vera's and went into an earnest conference. It was then, for the first time, that the girls began to notice how artificial Giggles seemed. Hitherto they had been so preoccupied with her manner itself that they had not considered whether it was appropriate or not.

Lily scowled critically as she watched Giggles do her stuff. "Something is wrong," she pronounced.

"It's about time you discovered that!" cried Vera reproachfully. She stood still in the middle of the floor, looking from one to the other of her critics with a mortified blush.

"You look as if you were acting," observed Victoria wisely.

"I *am* acting," she snapped. "And I'm sick and tired of it. If I didn't love Fitz so much I'd never keep on with it!"

Just then the postman came, bringing a letter from Fitz. Vera tore it open and scanned it through anxiously for a sign of what she wanted to find. But hope died as she saw nothing in its lines, or even between its lines, that was encouraging.

"I might as well give up!" she wailed. "He's just friendly—and nothing but."

Sinking to a heap in the middle of the floor she buried her face in the crumpled letter and gave way to tears, to the great distress of her sympathetic companions.

"I love Fitz so much," she sobbed heartbrokenly. "And I can't make him fall in love with me. What can I do?"

There was a silence, broken only by her sobbing breath, for the other girls did not know what to say by way of comfort. If their so carefully planned line had failed what more could be done?

And into this silence came a voice.

"*Be yourself, Giggles. Be yourself!*" it advised.

GIGGLES sprang to her feet, eyes wide open with astonishment.

It sounded like Fitz's voice—harsher, but in his manner of speaking. Yet the three girls were alone in the room. She turned to Victoria and Lily and saw them staring open-mouthed at Rosy!

As she followed their gaze Rosy spoke again, flapping his wings and ruffling his neck as if very proud of himself. "Be yourself, Giggles," he reiterated in a decided tone.

Giggles darted over to the cage.

"Say it again, Rosy," she urged. "He imitates Fitz to perfection," she told the girls.

But Rosy seemed to feel that, having spoken his piece, he had done his duty. He withdrew to a corner of his perch and ignored all further requests to recite.

"I wonder where he learned to say that," mused Victoria.

"I have an idea!" cried Giggles. "Maybe Fitz taught him!"

"He must have."

"But I never told Fitz I was called Giggles," she confessed.

"Perhaps Helene told him," suggested Lily.

Giggles stared speculatively at Rosy. "Rosy said 'be yourself,' didn't he?" she said, pondering it. "Girls!" she burst out suddenly, "you don't sup-

pose he means anything by it, do you? Perhaps that's the answer!"

"What do you mean?" they asked in unison.

"You know, Victoria said I looked as if I was acting. Perhaps Fitz thinks so, too—and wants me to act natural—to be myself."

"And not be smart?" said Lily skeptically.

"I'm going to take a chance on it," Giggles decided. "It will be heaven just to act natural."

"You have nothing to lose," Victoria encouraged her, "and everything to gain!"

Giggles got so worked up at this happy idea that she could hardly wait till Fitz returned. With her reversion to her natural self she seemed to achieve a popularity which the elegant line had failed to bring her. Invitations came pouring in from the Holt Streeters, while Helene took her up in earnest.

"HELLO!"

Giggles clutched the phone to her heart at the sound of the voice she had been longing to hear. Happiness choked her so she could not reply at once.

"Who's there?" demanded Fitz, evidently perplexed at the silence.

"It's me—Giggles!" she said and waited breathlessly to see how he would take it.

He chuckled and said, "I'm glad of it! May I come over?"

"Now? Aren't you working to-day?"

"I just got in—haven't gone to the office yet. I'm taking to-day off—to play with you."

"Fitz—you darling! Hurry over!"

She could scarcely contain herself while waiting for Fitz. To think he had called her up right away before he even reported to his office! And he had seemed to like it when she said it was "Giggles!" She ran to the window a dozen times to see if he was coming.

"How's the girl?" he asked, catching both her hands in his.

"Fine," she replied, "but I've been lonesome," she added candidly.

"What'll we do with our holiday?" he said. "Where'll we go?"

"Let's go to Coney Island," she proposed in a burst of daring. "To-day is the carnival."

He looked at her dubiously.

"Sometimes it's nice to be in a crowd—specially when every one is out for a good time," she remarked.

He laughed in great good humor. "Okay, captain. Let's go."

Having thrown off her cloak of elegance Giggles abandoned herself to the fun of the thing. She squealed with delight as they viewed themselves in the distorted mirrors, giggled spasmodically as they slid down the bumpy slide, got lost in the maze, and were swept off by the whirligig.

"I didn't know you cared for this sort of thing," exclaimed Fitz, red in the face from laughing.

"There's lots you don't know about me," she retorted gayly.

They rode on the ferris wheel, they threw baseballs at nigger heads, and they ate weenies and frozen custard. It was a perfect day.

On the way home Giggles began to wonder what Fitz thought about it. He would never see her more unrestrained than she had been when she slid head over heels in the revolving barrel and could not get up for laughing; nor further from elegance than when she bit into a huge hot dog sandwich and got mustard on the end of her nose! If that was what he wanted,

well, she reflected, he got full measure. Not once had she done anything for effect, not once had she posed consciously, not once had she said anything that she did not mean.

She had just been herself—Giggles.

They were in a taxi, homeward bound, and Vera, thinking of their countless other taxi rides in which nothing had happened, sent up a prayer that this time it would be different! Her prayers were answered.

Fitz put his arm around her and drew her to him.

"Tired, honey?" he asked solicitously.

"Yes," she acknowledged, resting her head comfortably against his shoulder. "But awfully happy."

"I had no idea you had so much pep," he said. "You're different—different from the Vera I left."

"You left Vera, and came back to find Giggles," she murmured with a giggle.

He hugged her closer. "Finds is keeps, isn't it?" he demanded, and bent to kiss her.

"Oh, Fitz," she whispered when her lips were free again, "I thought you were never going to kiss me!"

"I thought you didn't want me to," he retorted in self-defense. "You acted so stand-offish. I was puzzled about you. You seemed to have such a thick coat of veneer. I knew that underneath it you were *my* girl—but the veneer scared me off. I confess that I didn't like it at all."

"And now am I your girl, Fitz dear?" She put up her mouth for another kiss; she had been starving for them for so long that she felt she would never get enough!

"I'll tell the world!" He kissed her again—and again. Then he asked, "Did Rosy speak his piece? Is that what did it?"

"Yes," she admitted. "That's what woke me up."

"I like you so much better awake. Oh, Giggles, you're the cutest little trick. You're even better than I thought you'd be. I can't tell you how I hated all that affectation."

"So did I!" she blurted. "I only did it for your sake."

"All that acting was for *my* sake? What was the big idea?"

"So you'd notice me. I loved you that first time we danced together, and I wanted to make your love me. And because you were a Holt Streeter I thought you expected girls to be very finished and sophisticated!"

"Well, you nearly queered it!" he said, laughing at her while he held her close with a gentle caress. "I almost dropped you at the very beginning. But something held me—the real you was calling to me, and asking me to be patient."

"You certainly were patient!"

"I'll say! I couldn't stand your grand manner. But I didn't know what to do about it. I didn't want to do anything to offend you. Then I thought of teaching the parrot to say that."

"I got the idea. Rosy deserves a gold medal," she sighed rapturously.

"What do *I* deserve?" he demanded, crushing her against him and looking down deep into her eyes.

She giggled. "Love and kisses!" she murmured mischievously.

"Okay. I'll take them on the installment plan—and collect the first payment right now!"

"I do not care to have you with me. I—I am going home"

Heart Insurance

All day long she adjusted claims, yet one claim seemed impossible of adjustment— love's claim to her heart

By B. Virginia Lee

ARALAIDE TOWNE took out her savings bank book and looked at her balance. Sixty-two fifty exactly! It was the savings of six months, six months of doing without little niceties. She had been counting on it for a vacation which was only two weeks ahead, but now the figures stared at her with an altered significance.

Sixty-two dollars and fifty cents. It represented the smart cut suit of soft beige crêpe, the pair of reptile shoes and the little French hat she had seen only that very morning in a smart little shop on Geary Street. It meant

even more. It meant looking nice for Roy Alberts, who undoubtedly had loved and forgotten scores of beautiful women.

Only a few minutes before he had stopped at her desk to ask her to dine with him that evening.

"Don't dress," he had smiled at her. "Just put on some sort of suit. You'll know what is proper. We'll go to the beach in my car. Want to have a homey little chat."

It all seemed incredible. Only yesterday she had deposited fifty cents without a thought of withdrawing her savings. But Roy expected her to change her working clothes. He couldn't understand a girl having such a limited wardrobe as herself. That meant he must never suspect—and there was only one thing to do. She was so glad she'd saved this much. It would get just the very things she needed for tonight, and she could save up that amount again. She looked again at the balance of her savings and then across the rows of desks to where he sat working.

A ghastly kind of nervousness descended upon her. What if she spent all that money for the chic suit and, after all, it was only for an evening? What if Roy really cared for Helen Hargraves, as they all said in the office? He was talking with Helen now!

AS her lovely violet eyes moistened he looked up and smiled back at her. It was a peculiar sort of smile. Aralaide couldn't understand that smile. It was mixed with sympathy, pity and love.

Yes, there was love mingled there in that smile. Possibly the reflection from her own eyes. She'd been in love with him from the very first time she'd looked up from her typewriter into his eyes.

In that moment she knew she was in love—he was the man she'd waited for all these years. She hadn't attempted to reason why. Hadn't asked herself whether it was his clean cut profile, his immaculately tailored clothes or the way he had of suddenly smiling. She had simply looked up and let her large violet eyes rest a moment on his face. And at that moment her heart did a somersault and she knew she'd completed her search for *him*. Her heart went racing around her breast and her silly tongue refused to speak.

"This is Mr. Alberts, Miss Towne," the boss had said. Then he had turned to the young man, "and this is Miss Aralaide Towne. Mr. Alberts is our new claims adjuster, and you'll do his stenographic work. He's your boss from now on. He can fire or hire you at will," Mr. Hargraves had laughed and patted Aralaide kindly on the shoulder.

Mr. Alberts had smiled. Perhaps it was that sudden smile that clinched Aralaide's heart completely.

"I hope we'll be able to get along, Miss Towne," he had said, and his eyes held hers for ever so short a moment.

Aralaide's voice trembled, and she wondered if he noticed it when she assured him she'd try to get along with him.

The first week things went along smoothly. Twice he asked her to lunch. They went to a cozy restaurant resting at the base of Telegraph Hill, in the Latin Quarter of San Francisco.

On each occasion, long after the others had gone, Roy Alberts sat and talked with her. He asked her many things: how long she'd been with the company; how she liked it; how the

chap who'd left had handled the job. It seemed to Aralaide that in some vague way his success at this new job depended upon her.

"Of course, I've come from the East," he explained. "This territory and Western Insurance Accident Commission's methods are a bit new to me. I'd appreciate a tip now and then. But insurance!" he gave a queer little laugh, "I've practically been brought up on it, and outside a few new twists here and there the principles are about the same."

Aralaide felt a lump in her throat. Somehow she knew he was lying, that he'd never before been inside an insurance office of any sort! She knew he didn't know a thing about Employer's Liability or State Compensation Laws, or the difference between insured and assured. She knew he'd bluffed his way past the information desk and finally landed in Mr. Hargraves's office. And she knew, in some vague sort of way, that his success in this job meant more than he'd admit.

But there had been a secret fear. Could it be that what she thought was an interest in herself on his part was only a desire for information that would put him over? Could it be he was only being nice to her to find out the details of his job? Playing her?

She wanted to cry when she thought these things, but she knew she must keep her nerve. So she answered all his questions whenever he asked them, while her heart went on doubting.

But now things were different. She could laugh at the office bunch who had been telling her he was in love with Helen Hargraves; that he had only been working her for information. She could laugh them to shame, for, hadn't he asked her to go with him tonight, and for no reason at all? He knew most everything now, and what he didn't know he knew she'd gladly tell him.

Aralaide felt warm when she thought about how things had changed.

AS she looked at him now and he returned her smile her heart turned completely over. She saw him rise and excuse himself to Helen, and then he was coming toward her desk. Often he rang for her to come to his desk. The past two days he had not done even that.

"Miss Towne," he said kindly, "it just occurred to me, you might like to go home now." He took out his watch. "Maybe you could make it back here by five thirty. That would save time. I won't be able to stay out very late. Just dinner, and the earlier we go the better it will be."

"But I've these claim reports to clean up," she said. Her eyes lingered on his face, little shadows of feeling and emotion playing in them.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered shortly. "You'll have time for that tomorrow. I won't be here all day, you know. Going out on that Fielding claim at Santa Cruz."

Aralaide nodded. Helen Hargraves was coming toward them. At that moment Aralaide hated Helen, hated her attitude of assumed importance where Roy was concerned. Helen didn't half appreciate Roy. My, how she'd like to tell him that Helen was only clinging to him, smiling for him, simply to spite Craig Ringgold. But—how could she? Craig had gone away before Roy applied for the position. Every one knew when Craig left he left Helen as well as his job behind him.

As Aralaide looked at Helen now

she wanted to tell Roy exactly how the situation stood. She smiled bitterly. Why should she take such an interest in his affairs? If he was blind, why should she lend him her eyes? But no matter how logical her reasoning, it didn't help her any. Because Aralaide was quite sure she loved him, and hadn't he asked her to dine with him?

"Thanks so much," she said. "I'll do that, and be back at five thirty, if you're sure the work can hold over." She closed her desk and rose just as Helen joined them.

Helen bubbled over with sweetness and walked to the office door with her. "Father says," she said in an undertone, "that if Roy makes good on that claim to-morrow he's going to make him assistant claims superintendent. But, of course, father is doing it partly on account of me. Mr. Alberts and I are to be married next month, and, of course, father couldn't see me marry on the salary Roy's getting. But he's really made splendid progress since he's been here."

Aralaide nodded and gave her an absent little smile and left the office. She shivered with panic and clenched her hands in a desperate effort to pull herself together. "If Roy makes good to-morrow . . . " The sentence kept coming back into her head with the stinging imprint of the real truth.

She wished she'd told Helen then and there that he wouldn't make good unless she, Aralaide Towne, wanted him to. Why hadn't she told Helen that the fate of the Hargraves-Alberts marriage depended entirely on her little shoulders? That unless she carried on as she had been doing, and took three-quarters of Roy's work on herself, he wouldn't succeed? It was such exquisite irony.

She brought herself to a stop in front of her bank. She stood there a brief moment contemplating her next step. The cards looked as if they were stacked against her, yet hadn't he asked her to dine with him? Hadn't he smiled with a peculiar kind of glowing smile?

One mad plunge, one glorious hour, one taste of life! Clothes, the admiration of the man she loved. Just clothes might change the whole world for her, one could never tell. At least it was worth a trial. She raised her plucky little chin in the air and walked into the bank as though she owned the world. Down the corridor and to the little back window, where she wrote out a withdrawal slip, sixty-two dollars and fifty cents worth of pleasure and the possibility of showing a man the value of herself.

HALF an hour later she was in the private salon of the little French shop on Geary, surrounded by ravishingly beautiful clothes. A polite French woman was murmuring ecstatic things about her coloring, her figure.

"You had a beige suit in the window this morning," she said nonchalantly, as if buying beige suits was her usual afternoon's occupation. She had heard that people with money often hunted bargains, that only the newly rich threw money away lavishly. The woman was clearly impressed.

"Ah, the suit, the shoes, the hat? Very chic. A specialty only for customers who know specialties . . . " She beamed, and Aralaide knew she was sincere.

When the suit had been brought out, the shoes, the smart hat placed jauntily upon Aralaide's head, the French woman clasped her hands. "Mademoiselle is so easy to dress," she murmured softly.

Aralaide smiled and surveyed her reflection in the long gilt mirror.

"I think I shall wear this suit today," Aralaide turned to the woman.

"Certainly," the other responded. "And mademoiselle's own gown?"

"You let me walk right into a trap!"

Aralaide colored vividly. "I'll take it with me," she said finally. "And the price is sixty dollars, hat, shoes, and suit?"

The French woman beamed again, and Aralaide counted out three twenty dollar bills and departed with her bundle under her arm, the exquisite beige suit clinging to her body.

When she met Roy Alberts at five thirty, Aralaide did not have to have him tell her that he was well pleased with the way she looked, but yet his words came as music to her ears.

"You should always wear that kind of suit," he said, taking her arm and leading her to his car. "You are positively exquisite."

Aralaide's heart throbbed with fierce excitement.

HE took her to a café on the beach. She had heard of it, but had never been there before. The ballroom, with its rising dome in the center, resembled a picture she had once seen of an Egyptian night sky, scattered with stars that twinkled with amazing realism at a pale, slim, crescent moon. The dance floor itself was of crystal, beneath which were concealed a thousand multicolored lights which flashed to everchanging hues. From the four corners, lime green spot lights gleamed, adding a queer, almost evil note to the whole effect.

"How beautiful—how beautiful," she cried again and again.

"I'm only sorry we won't be able to stay and dance. Later every one comes in evening clothes. It is quite gay then." He led her across the floor to the little table near a window that looked out onto the sea. Just below the waves beat relentlessly against a stone wall.

During the meal Roy was quiet. There was something on his mind. What was it? She wanted to ask him a million questions, but his attitude closed the door.

Only once did he mention business. "You know, if I can adjust that Fielding claim to-morrow it will mean everything in the world to me. It's almost certain Hargraves will give me the claims superintendent job. You don't know what it means . . . "

Then when they were having their *demi-tasse,* he spoke again. "I suppose you wonder why I asked you out here to-night?"

Aralaide closed her eyes for the moment, utterly enslaved, quivering to the thrill of expectancy. Was he going to ask her if she could love him, providing he made good on that claim? The thought of lurking danger, of possible disaster, was far from her mind. A fire of recklessness surged through her veins.

"Why should I wonder?" she laughed back at him. "It has been delightful. If it is to ask me about that claims job, I can tell you most anything. Is it that?"

He shook his head. "But you should wonder;" he said rather hoarsely. "I asked you out to-night to tell you . . ." He turned suddenly white. "I couldn't tell you in the office, but that job means more to me than anything else. I've got to have more money. You wouldn't be interested if I told you why, but it all comes to this: Helen Hargraves doesn't like you. She can get her father to advance me if I let you go. She said so. I couldn't give you notice in the office. I'll help you into something else, but this means so much . . . "

Aralaide's world was swimming. She tried to look at him, but her eyes were filled with tears, and she thought his were too.

"Somehow you've been more than a stenographer to me. You've helped me more than you will ever know—and now . . . well, two weeks from to-day, when your vacation starts, some one else will fill your place."

There, it was all over. He sat there, his hand halfway across the table, as though to touch hers.

Aralaide turned pale. She felt sick and faint. If he spoke another word she would scream. With a strangled sob she turned away, white faced and disillusioned. But beneath the bitterness in her heart was a furious, surging anger against the man she had loved. He was a despicable cad, a cheat. Who had made him successful? Who had taught him all the insurance he knew? She had! If she'd let him figure out everything for himself, where would he be now?

She'd made him the type of man Helen Hargraves wanted, made him successful by slaving like a ditch digger for him, doing all the work he ought to have been doing. Why, he actually thought he was successful! While she had been down night after night making out estimates of doctor bills, finishing up claims for the home office, figuring out the injured employee's exact amount of compensation due. Everything he ought to have done . . . providing he knew how! And him getting all the credit.

What was it Helen had said, "If he makes good on the adjustment to-morrow dad will promote him, then we'll be married!"

A hard, broken laugh burst from Aralaide as she rose to her feet. "Pardon me, I do not care to stay longer. You do not need to bother."

He was at her side instantly.

"Please! I do not care to have you with me." All the haughtiness of past generations surged through her being and to her assistance. He was murmuring something about explaining, but she pretended not to hear him.

She realized in a blinding flash that she should be glad she had found out. He had made her hate him and still she knew it wasn't hate. She knew she would never hate him, no matter how things had gone. She was weak and sick at heart. He'd asked her out here and she'd spent her last penny to make herself look nice for him . . . and he had only asked her to soften the bluntness of the word "Fired!"

THE cool damp air felt good. She crossed the boardwalk and went down into the wet sands of the beach. How she longed for another luncheon with him at the little place nestling beneath Telegraph Hill! How she wished she might make that claims adjustment of to-morrow easier for him, regardless of the fact that his success meant his advancement and Helen as a wife.

After all it was his wish for success. Hadn't he told her in those little luncheons that it meant more than life to him—whether he succeeded at this job or not? And hadn't he said something like that to-night?

She didn't care about losing the job so much, but to miss that occasional bewildered and puzzled look in his eye when some problem disturbed him... this she thought she could not bear. Oh, how thoroughly she knew him and how completely she loved him! What did it matter? . . . then the bleakness of her position struck her. It was all gone, the hope that he might understand her and realize she cared. She knew there wasn't another man born who could come into her heart. She knew it was surely as a man without a finger knows there'll never be another one grown on his hand. He was her man, no matter what fate took her from him. He had fired her, she had spent her last penny to please him—and yet he knew his success depended utterly upon her.

It was nearly nine o'clock before Aralaide left the beach. She walked up the moist, heavily packed sand near the breakers to the Cliff House. She turned about and got back on the boardwalk, and wasn't conscious she'd boarded a down town car till the conductor called out for fares. Nor was she aware of the fact that she had ridden clear back into town until she caught a glimpse of the Ferry Building, just a few blocks down on Market Street.

When the car reached California Street she got off, automatically, as she'd been doing for years.

WITH a start she realized she was in front of the Indemnity office. She looked through the tall shadowed windows, and from the sidewalk could discern a light over her own desk. Had she left the light on? She took out her key with the intention of turning the light off.

She opened the door and was inside the office before she realized there was some one there already. He was standing over her desk. She couldn't make

out who it was, his back was turned toward her, his head bent to the floor and his hands buried in his pockets. As she watched, afraid to move one way or the other, he started pacing back and forth down the aisle between the desks.

She stood in the shadows for a moment. What could this stranger be doing in this office? Then suddenly he stood tense, as if sensing another presence. Instantly the entire office was flooded with lights and she stood facing Roy Alberts, his hand trembling on the switch he had just turned.

"You?" He seemed relieved. "You must have come to my call. I've been so utterly miserable, Aralaide. You wouldn't let me explain . . ."

At first she stood there as if she were a stone image. She wanted, with all her heart, to fling herself into his arms, to let him tell her anything, anything, but instead she heard herself saying:

"I came back, on the contrary, to finish up the reports I usually spend my evenings here working on." She said it with a meaning.

She went to her desk, ignoring him, and threw open the top. There, to her amazement, was a typed note. She bent over it and read:

MY DARLING:

You misunderstood me and wouldn't let me explain. Now you have gone and I may never see you again. But if you think bitterly of me for my action to-night, perhaps you will understand after you have read this.

I took this job last month because my mother was very ill. Medical fees are enormous. This job means her life or death. When Helen Hargraves told me to-day if I would let you go she'd see that I got an advancement, dearest, it seemed the only way.

I thought you would let me explain and would understand, but you were gone. I want you to know I have loved you ever since that first day when our eyes met, and I shall always love you.

ROY ALBERTS.

Aralaide looked up from the note. He was sitting across from her, his head buried in his hands. She didn't know what to say. Finally she rose and went to him.

"Why didn't you tell me? We'd have found a way out surely." Then, as if it was a second thought, she added brightly: "He'd give you an advancement anyway if you settle that claim at Santa Cruz to-morrow."

"I know," Roy admitted gloomily. "But I can't settle it. I don't know a thing about it! I'm not kidding myself—it's been you that's put me over. Things wouldn't have clicked as they have for me if it hadn't been for you. The claims I've gone out on have just seemed to settle themselves." He stopped as suddenly as he had begun, unable to go on. It was as if he were struggling with a confession he didn't understand himself.

ARALAIDE'S heart sang within her. He was going to understand at last. Her eyes met his, filled with understanding. But she mustn't say anything yet . . . There was time enough, after he had got whatever it was off his chest . . .

"I don't know the first thing about insurance. I didn't know a blooming thing when I first came. And the little I've picked up doesn't amount to a row of beans. I sort of bluffed my way past Hargraves, made him think I knew insurance. And whenever anything difficult came up, why, somehow or other I managed to grasp the fine points of the claim and settle it."

He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Then he edged his

chair over to hers, determined to get through with it.

"But this Fielding claim to-morrow gets me. I—"

Aralaide nodded. They were back in their familiar little chairs. "I know," was all she said.

"You know?" he almost shouted at her. "You mean you've known all along that I didn't know a thing about insurance?"

"Well, you see, the second day you took me to lunch," Aralaide paused and drew a paper from her desk drawer, "and you left this letter on the table. It wasn't addressed to any one at all, and somehow or other I got it into the book I was reading. I didn't discover it till I'd got home and read it. I couldn't tell whose it was, there being no names on it. And after I'd read it and recalled where I'd found it, I couldn't very well tell you I knew your secret. So I kept still, and simply came down after hours and..."

Roy took the letter. His hands trembled slightly. A glance told him what it was. Rereading it now, his eyes lingered over one paragraph:

> . . . I've landed it, but how I'll keep it the Lord only knows. They've no idea I just left college and how I left it. Heaven forbid they ever find out. But I've the cutest steno. Took her to lunch day before yesterday and she seemed to know a helluva lot about insurance. If my luck runs straight, she'll direct me in every move—and I'll direct her in the end. She's a K O, and I don't mean maybe.

When he finished reading he looked at Aralaide and shook his head. "And you knew all this about me, and came down here nights to do my work!" It was accusing.

"Well, I—I wanted you to make good."

"You let me think I was a wow. You let me mount my high horse and ride right into a trap," he said, disregarding her statement.

"I don't understand. I am sorry if you think I've let you run right into this Fielding claim. I know it's a hard one, but I'll help. I—somehow I'll find a way to help you through it. I know how much it means to you . . ." Aralaide stopped suddenly.

"I wonder if you do?" he was asking her, and his eyes were so near her own she could almost see her own white face reflected in them.

"Of course," she smiled. "Success on this claim will mean promotion, and promotion means marriage to Helen Hargraves . . ." She stopped suddenly, remembering his note.

"Helen Hargraves . . . Marriage!" Roy Alberts was amazed. "You don't think I—?"

"Well, Helen told me so to-day."

"Aralaide Towne," said Roy, with a little aggressive note in his voice, "I may be all kinds of a blithering idiot at compensation insurance, but I'm not when it comes to affairs of the heart. Helen Hargraves cares no more for me than—why," he laughed shortly, "she just thought she did, and thought I cared for her. But I've just got through telling her she was all wrong. I don't know why I told her so to-night, especially after all that has happened and that case coming up to-morrow." He stopped short, struggling to get his thoughts and his mind straight on what he wanted to say. Then he went on, plunging into the heart of it:

"Can't you see, honey, I knew that it didn't make much difference to Helen. I could get the job anyway, but somehow I simply couldn't."

Aralaide's eyes were wide. He'd called her honey out loud!

"And that's why, you see, I've got to make good on that claim to-morrow. I might as well tell you I've never stopped thinking about what I wrote in that letter you found. It was a draft of a letter of big importance to me. You see, if I can somehow make the right adjustment on that Fielding claim to-morrow I'll have enough money for mother and a promotion as well—and sufficient promise of a future to make another claims adjustment!"

"And that—?" Aralaide's mind was in a daze.

"A heart claim—adjusting your heart to mine, dearest."

The next moment Aralaide was in his arms, her little world running wildly hither-thither, and his lips hungrily kissing her own.

SHE broke away, excited and flushed. "But don't you see," she said happily, "it's getting late, and if you're going to get over that adjustment to-morrow we've got to get busy."

But just at that time the watchman came through. It was eleven o'clock and the building had to be cleared and locked for the night. He was polite but firm.

"Now, you see?" she said half reproachfully. "We've lost all our time, and I can't possibly show you all the things about that policy and—"

"How about coming down there with me to-morrow?"

"I couldn't possibly do that. People would talk."

He held her coat until she slipped into it. Then, turning her about, he looked at her seriously, his hands on her shoulders.

"But they wouldn't talk if you went as my wife, honey."

She stared at him, her eyes sparkling, her heart hammering furiously. And, carried away with the idea, Roy opened her desk and put a sheet of paper in the typewriter.

"We'll leave a note for Hargraves, sweetheart. I'll type it."

> Aralaide will not be in for work this morning. She is taking a honeymoon with me to Santa Cruz while we close the Fielding claim. We were married to-day.

He scribbled his signature to the note and put it on Hargraves's desk. Then he leaned over to Aralaide's wrist watch.

"We'll make it, dearest. I know just the place." And, picking her up, he carried her down the sober rows of desks to the front portals of the office.

"Let me down, Roy. Why, people'll think we're crazy!"

"Not on your life. I'll carry you straight to the marriage altar. I'm afraid you might evade me on some clause in the heart policy."

He kissed her.

"I'm taking no chances, honey, till the justice of the peace says it's all over. This is a claim I'll settle for life!"

Louise!—Well, he'd show her that he could make good!

The Loyal Heart

The Harbor of Happiness looms ahead for two loyal hearts

By Ruby M. Ayres

CHAPTER XVII

SILAS BRUNTON walked away from Louise with despair in his heart. It was almost the first time in his life that he had ever wanted a thing and been unable to get it.

All the way back from England he had been so sure of her—he loved her so much he had not thought it possible that in the end he would not win her.

He was a simple soul in many ways, and when, after his father's death, he found himself a wealthy man he had been sure that his money would weigh heavily in his favor with Louise. Women liked money better than any-

thing, he told himself, and he could give her everything money could buy.

He could have borne her refusal, and gone on hoping, so long as there was no other man in the case; but her simple statement that she loved Bruce and was to marry him came as a crushing blow.

Silas was wise enough to know that Louise meant what she said, and he was half mad with jealousy and thwarted desire when at last he flung himself out of the house.

He loved her, and she hated him; he was haunted by the look in her eyes, and the anger in her voice as she told him to go; they seemed to follow him down the street like hurrying, dogging footsteps which he could not outstrip. He had only seen Bruce once in his life, but he felt that he hated him as he had never thought it possible to hate any man.

Silas was sure that it was only a question of hours before he would read Bruce's name on newspaper placards in letters a foot high; he found some faint consolation in the thought. Then perhaps, after all, Louise would turn to him when she found herself dragged through scandal—her name coupled with a criminal name that would soon be on every one's lips.

At first he had read the unsavory details of the case with feelings of pity. "Poor devil!" had been his thought, but now that pity had gone—he hated Trevor Bruce as if he had been his most deadly enemy.

If he only knew where the brute was to be found he would make it his business to go round and tell him what he thought of him. Then he remembered suddenly that the newspaper had mentioned his address—but what was it exactly?

He turned into the nearest drug store and consulted the telephone book.

He ran a shaking finger down the long list of names—Broxup, Broza, Bruce—here it was, J. Trevor Bruce.

Silas stopped the first taxicab that came along and gave Trevor's address.

He would see him and tell him exactly what he thought of him for daring to drag a defenseless girl through all this shameful scandal. He sat staring before him with hard eyes and a set jaw, only remembering the little broken sound in Louise's voice when she said "I love him—I've always loved him. We are going to be married."

He paid the taxi driver three times his fare, too impatient to wait for his change, and entered the building.

He had no set plan in his mind; he was driven blindly by his bitter jealousy. He had not believed himself capable of such intense feeling; it was as though some animal had got him by the throat and was choking all consciousness from him except the passionate longing to destroy the thing that was destroying him.

Halfway up the stairs two men passed him; to any one who had time to notice them, they would obviously have been plain-clothes detectives, but Silas brushed past them without a glance and rang the bell at Trevor's door.

IT was opened almost at once by Bruce himself, and for a moment the two men stared at one another.

Then Bruce laughed:

"What, may I ask, do you want?"

"My name's Silas Brunton—"

"I know who you are." A swift anxiety flashed across Trevor's eyes. "What do you want? Is anything wrong? Louise—"

"I want to speak to you."

Bruce walked back into the room.

"Come in then, and close the door after you."

Silas obeyed. He was conscious of the bare dismantled look of the place, as he followed Trevor across the tiny hall into the sitting room; carpets up, curtains down, hardly any furniture.

Bruce was standing with his back to the empty fireplace, where yesterday's ashes still filled the grate.

"What do you want?" he asked again uncompromisingly, and Silas answered as bluntly.

"I've come to tell you, you can't marry Miss Lindsay!"

There was a little silence, then Bruce said calmly:

"Well, you've told me—so now you can get out."

Silas went on doggedly:

"It's impossible—only a cad would think of such a thing. You'll ruin her life—after all this scandal—"

Trevor interrupted sneeringly: "Only a damned fool would come here on such a damn fool errand."

Neither of them saw the slight absurdity of the situation; they were both in deadly earnest, and Silas went on again as if he had not heard the interruption:

"You're taking a rotten advantage of her. Even if you get out of this—mess ... what have you got to offer a girl like that? She'll be miserable—"

Trevor took a step forward.

"If you hadn't the excuse of wanting her yourself, do you know what I'd do to you?" he asked in a dangerously quiet voice.

Silas stood his ground.

"Throw me out, I suppose. You can try if you like—I'm a match for you."

Bruce turned away with a short laugh.

"Oh, get out, you silly young fool."

Silas flushed crimson. "If you think you're going to put me off like this you're mistaken. You know as well as I do that she'll never be happy with you. If you're arrested—"

Trevor turned slowly round. "If I'm—*what?*" he asked, then, before Silas could reply, he had covered the space between them, seized him by the arms, and was slowly forcing him backward to the door.

"I don't want to hurt you—" he said between clenched teeth, "but if you don't get—*out*—"

With a sudden violent movement he kicked open the half closed door, swinging Silas through it at the same moment and across the narrow hall out onto the stairs, and before Silas could recover from the sudden attack the door was slammed in his face.

BRUCE went back to the dismantled room, looking rather white and shaken. He lit a cigarette and was surprised to find how his hand shook.

Yet Silas had been sincere enough—fond of little Louise no doubt.

"You're taking a rotten advantage of her." That was what he had said.

Well—wasn't it true?

When they were married . . . For the first time Bruce grimly faced what life would mean when he and Louise had gone off to start life again.

No money—no future—only a girl's love and courage.

Would she be as miserable as that young jackass had declared?

No doubt there would be times when things would be difficult; Bruce knew that with him no woman would find life all plain sailing. And yet—Louise loved him and was willing to risk it.

He swore softly and lit a fresh cigarette.

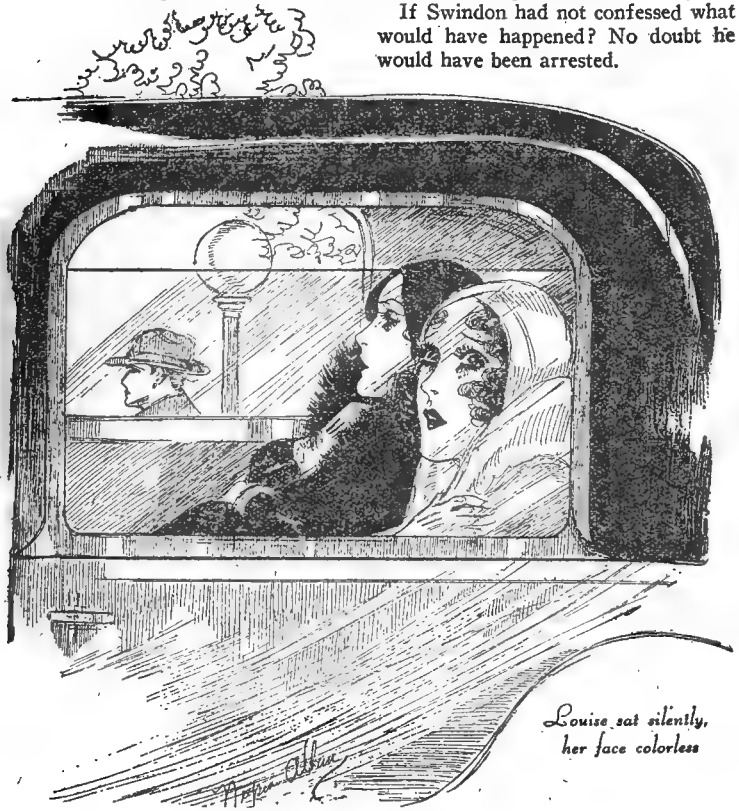
Half an hour ago he had felt almost happy—after those detectives had called to tell him about Swindon's confession.

That was a rotten thing—shooting his own wife.

Trevor suddenly saw Mercia's face, laughing and beautiful as it had been that night she was here with him and Louise came.

It had been a shock during the last few days to find how bad his reputation really was. Apparently every one believed him capable even of taking life.

If Swindon had not confessed what would have happened? No doubt he would have been arrested.



Louise sat silently, her face colorless

And would there still be people who would suspect him—it was an unpleasant thought.

Bruce stood staring down at the floor, lost in retrospection.

A cad and a blackguard—he had been called worse things than that, and yet Louise loved him and believed in him.

What would she have done had he

slipped out of things; if she had not come to him that last night and stopped him?

She would have been free at any rate, and no doubt in time she would have forgotten him and married Brunton or some other boy who could have given her everything, which he could not.

BRUCE had never wanted to marry; he had always dreaded the idea of being tied to one woman for countless years; and yet, as he stood alone in his cold room, it seemed a very sweet thing to think of Louise as that one woman.

Strangely enough there was nothing very terrifying in the thought of the future either, even though so far he could not see where it led; there was even something of pleasurable anticipation in the thought of a fresh start.

He was still a young man and strong, and he had never feared life. He had been bored with it, but he had never feared it. It would be rather fine to start with nothing at the bottom of the ladder and fight his way up; an achievement to show Louise that he could make good.

He laughed softly to himself at the thought.

It would be something to fight for—something to get his teeth into and wrestle with.

Louise had pluck too, as well as loyalty—she had never given him up, even though he must often have wounded her almost to the death. Well, in future, he would deserve her loyalty and courage; he would show her that the good she had always believed to be in him was really there.

Bruce took his hat and coat and went out.

He walked along the street whistling the tune to which he and Louise had danced that night that seemed so long ago.

Wonderful, oh, it's wonderful, to be
in love with you . . .
Every little breeze seems to whisper
Louise—

Poor little girl; he would make it up to her in the future.

Birds in the trees seem to twitter
"Louise"—
Every little rose tells me it knows I
love you—

Bruce hastened his steps. It seemed a long time since he had held Louise in his arms.

A free man—the clouds of suspicion gone forever . . .

Walking was not swift enough—he would take a taxicab and forget the expense. He started to cross the road toward one that was slowly coming up on the opposite side.

Shouting—grinding of brakes—a wild leap forward—too late . . . a man's voice excitedly explaining:

"I thought he saw me; don't see how he could have failed to see me, but he walked right into me—as if he were blind—"

"Lift his head—gently . . . keep back there—"

The clamor and excitement of a street accident—in a moment a crowd had surged up from nowhere, talking, jostling, asking futile unanswered questions, but Bruce lay there inert and still, with the spring sunshine pouring pitilessly on his cold, impassive face.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was Agatha who broke the news to Louise, her father having flatly refused to have anything to do with it.

"I've borne enough, all this trouble and Swindon's death on top of it—and now you ask me to tell my only daughter a thing which may break her heart. I tell you I will do nothing of the kind. Tell her yourself."

Louise took the news of Trevor's accident quietly.

"I suppose there *is* something else that can happen," she said with white lips. "But there can't be anything very much."

She went with Agatha to the hospital, sitting silently looking out of the window, except once when she said: "You would tell me if he were dead, wouldn't you?"

And Agatha answered: "My dear, of course. And you mustn't give up hope — he may not be even badly hurt."

It had seemed such a long way to the hospital—repeated blocks in the traffic slowed them down.

Louise sat with her hands tightly clasped in her lap, her face ghastly in its pallor.

"Just when everything was coming right for us," she said with sudden passion. "I don't know what I've done that I can't have any happiness."

They got there at last, and Agatha looked anxiously at Louise.

"Are you sure you can bear it? Would you rather not go in?"

Louise smiled ever so faintly.

"Just because I was stupid this morning? You need not be afraid."

Trevor was still unconscious. Louise could not believe that he was really living as she looked down at his white face and still form. It was so unlike Trevor . . . She had always known him as laughing and careless.

She looked at the nurse who had brought them to him.

"Can I stay?" she asked.

"Oh, certainly," the nurse assented evenly.

Louise sat down beside him in the darkened room. She was not conscious of any acute feeling—just a faint wonderment that he did not open his eyes and smile at her.

Agatha was talking to the nurse. Louise caught words here and there. "No examination yet—they cannot tell. There may be internal injuries."

Then Agatha's whispered, "Do you think he—" and the nurse's shake of the head.

"We cannot tell yet."

The long hours went by.

"Don't you stay," Louise said presently. "You must be tired."

But Agatha obstinately refused to leave.

It was like a dream, Louise thought; a dream in which things go on happening even while you know subconsciously that they are not really happening at all.

They brought her some lunch, and she ate obediently, because she knew if she refused she would get faint and then they would send her home.

Thoughts went round and round in her brain like a wheel that will not stop running.

Lionel Swindon's face so often came before her—his kind eyes, his smile—odd to think she would never see him again.

Then Silas—poor Silas, whom she had said she hated. She had not meant that—she was afraid she had hurt him terribly. Perhaps he would be glad if Trevor died.

Fancy Trevor dying! . . . such a thing could not happen; it was all just the unreality of a dream.

Soon they would be married and go away together to start life over again. It would be such happiness to do every-

thing for him—to make the little money they had go as far as possible.

SOME one touched her arm.

"Will you go to the waiting room for a little while? The doctor is coming."

"I know at last! I love you better than life, little Louise!"

Louise raised her dazed, troubled eyes.

"Oh! What time is it, please?"

"It's nearly six, dear," Agatha answered.

Six! . . . had she sat there all day?

"You will let me come back again?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

She went away with Agatha's arm supporting her.

Down in the waiting room they found Louise's father, very agitated and at a loss to express his sympathy.

"Why don't you come home, my dear?" he said to Louise. "You can do no good here."

"Trevor might want me."

It seemed a lifetime till the nurse came to recall them.

"You can go back to Mr. Bruce now."

Agatha stayed behind to ask an anxious question.

"What does the doctor say? Is there—is he—"

"He has not said anything definite yet. It is difficult to make an examination properly, but . . . he is afraid there are injuries to his back."

The pater came forward. "You mean . . . what does that mean?"

The nurse smiled placatingly.

"I had best tell you the whole truth," she answered. "Mr. Bruce has injuries to his back—but the doctor hopes that it will only be a matter of a few months before he will be about again. It will depend upon the care given him."

CHAPTER XIX

"ONLY a few months!" The pater echoed the nurse's words in almost a shout. "Then who is going to support him, I should like to know?"

He broke off, shocked at his own words. It was an abominable thing to say, with the poor man lying there upstairs.

"Of course he'll be looked after," he began pompously. "Bruce fought

in the war, which is more than a good many did." He liked the sound of that and went on magnificently. "I shall see that he has every care and attention. For my daughter's sake if for no other reason."

The nurse said rather coldly that it was early yet to say what would be necessary—in a day or two they would be able to be more definite.

Agatha interposed.

"Dr. Harman wants a big fee," she said. "And Trevor is a poor man."

"What the deuce does that matter?" the pater snapped. "If I call Harman in I shall pay his fee. You can't accuse *me* of meanness."

Agatha turned impulsively and kissed his cheek—a thing she had not done voluntarily for years.

"Your bark is *so* much worse than your bite," she said affectionately.

Her brother brushed the kiss away with an irate hand, but he looked pleased. "There's only one satisfaction in all this wretched business," he said. "And that is that Louise won't be able to marry him at once."

Agatha raised her brows.

"Do you seriously mean that?"

"Mean it, of course I mean it! No daughter of mine would be such a fool. Take it from me, Agatha, Louise is a very sensible girl."

"And you take it from me," Agatha returned calmly, "that Louise would marry him if he were deaf, dumb, blind or insane! I am afraid you don't know your daughter at all, my dear."

And Agatha was right, for later in the evening when the pater was going home Louise said to him: "Of course I shall marry Trevor at once, no matter what happens.

"Oh, of course, of course, my dear," he answered hurriedly.

"A sweet girl that—a very sweet girl," he told himself as he hurried away. "Just exactly what I should expect my daughter to say."

BUT things were not so bad with Trevor as the doctor feared. After Dr. Harman had examined him he told the pater that Trevor's back was certainly injured, but that there were great hopes that perhaps in a month's time he would be able to walk again.

Louise's father paid a visit to his lawyers that afternoon, and when he came back he said to Agatha casually:

"I've decided to make a settlement on Louise."

He avoided looking at her as he spoke, and went on almost as if he were ashamed of what he had done.

"I suppose Louise means to stick to Bruce no matter what happens, and I can't see them starve, can I? Damn it all, my own daughter!"

He blew his nose vigorously to hide his emotion.

"Has Bruce been told yet?" he asked presently. "Told what Harman says about him, I mean?"

"Louise is going to tell him."

And Louise told him. The sun was streaming into the hospital room, making little pools of gold on the polished floor, and there was a big vase of daffodils on the table beside Trevor's bed.

Louise took both his hands in hers and smiled into his eyes. Trevor's eyes, awake and with the love light in them at last! Why, she had never before seen them quite as they looked now. Did Trevor love her more than she knew?

"Dearest," she half whispered, "it'll only be a little while. A few weeks, and then you'll be well again and we can begin our life together. Oh, Trevor—"

She could get no further. The happy tears overflowed.

Trevor reached for her hand. His old whimsical smile touched his mouth.

"Little Louise," he murmured, "I was on my way to you, to tell you that at last I knew—I love you better than life, Louise! I had made up my mind to devote the rest of my life to making you a happy woman, to proving to you and to every one that I am not as bad as I have been painted. I will prove it, Louise! I'll make good, and you'll be proud of me yet. You'll be my happy little wife, please God," his voice was still weak, but rang now with deep emotion. "There is one thing I must say—I did not deserve to be named in Swindon's divorce suit. I was not guilty. But I was indifferent because it seemed to me that nothing mattered. Will you believe me, Louise?"

Believe him? Oh, yes. And love—

Louise slipped to her knees beside his bed and gathered his head into the hollow of her shoulder.

"I love you," she said, low. "I'll always love you—"

"And never give me up?" he broke in reminiscently.

"Never, Trevor! My beloved, I knew you were worthy. I couldn't stop loving you if I tried. Faith carried me on, even when everything seemed against us. Now we are coming into our happiness at last!"

"Yes, and it will be my lifelong care to keep that happiness unbroken, to teach your eyes to shine and your lips to smile. Little Louise, will you come with me into the land of Dreams Come True?"

With a happy sigh, Louise laid her lips on her lover's.

THE END

The Messenger

TO-DAY a vagrant wind came whispering
From out a far expanse of rain-pearled sky,
A clean white wind washed in the light of stars,
Fragrant with perfume of jasmine and a faint
Exotic scent like orchids on a breathless night.

A laughing wind that lilted by
From out the wealth of gold-filmed blue;
Pausing an instant in its restless flight
To take and bear my dreaming thoughts to you!

—*A. Leslie*

How to Find Romance

The love story of Helen Wills has inspiration for every American girl

By Dorothy Dayton

THE trouble with most girls is that they sit around and dream beautiful dreams about love and happiness, and never bother very much about making those dreams come true.

Life seems unfair to them because they aren't as beautiful or as socially prominent or as popular as other girls, whom they envy. But the truth of the matter is that almost any intelligent girl can get pretty much what she wants from life, if she's willing to work for it, and is alert enough to seize such opportunities as she has.

This is the story of a girl everybody knows, for she is probably the most popular girl in America to-day. It is the story of Helen Wills, woman tennis champion of the world, and her struggle to win self-expression, fame, and what is probably even more important, romance and love.

Everybody who remembers Helen Wills in her early teens remembers her as a rather awkward, shy little girl, who was never very popular at parties. And even later, when she went to college, she was still quiet and shy, not very popular with boys, not a very good dancer, and, at that time, not especially good looking. Nor did she know how to dress with any particular flair.

Every girl wants to stand out from the crowd; to be noticed. That is one of the first secrets of popularity. Nothing succeeds like success, and every girl has a talent for something or other, if she would trouble to find it and develop it. It may be a gift for conversation, for dancing, for sports, or merely the gift for enjoying life so much that her company is a pleasure to everybody.

Even to acquire a reputation for beauty, or for wearing one's clothes well, or dancing, requires work, and life has little to offer the lazy or indifferent, or the girl who gives up merely because she isn't a raving beauty to begin with, is too shy to be popular, and can't dance as lightly as a summer zephyr.

Helen Wills was the daughter of a San Francisco physician, Dr. Clarence

Wills, and her family was a very nice middle-class family, not listed in the social register. To the casual observer, there was nothing particularly outstanding about her in any way. But she dreamed the dreams that all girls dream; she wanted to do things, to achieve, and she was determined to learn to do one or two things really well. Her father began teaching her to play tennis when she was quite young. And she soon discovered that a girl can be a belle on the tennis courts, though not in the ballroom.

For the California girl, tennis proved the door of opportunity, which opened to her an interesting life, invitations to tournaments, opportunity to meet people, to travel. And it was through tennis that she found romance.

Tennis, however, required hard work, lots of it, and continued application. After several years of playing in tournaments at home, and steadily improving her game, her big chance came. That was to come to New York and play in the national tournaments at Forest Hills. She didn't win any national championship that time, of course; in fact, the outstanding characteristic of Miss Wills was her willingness to learn; her determination never to give up in the face of defeat. Her playing did attract a lot of attention, however. But she was still too shy really to have a good time socially.

She went back home, worked harder than ever, and in 1923 returned and took the national championship crown from Mrs. Molla Mallory. She had taken her defeats smilingly; she took her triumphs with modesty. She achieved a reputation for good nature, good sportsmanship, fairness. Not very dazzling qualities, these, but they proved a solid foundation for an enduring popularity.

Then, with her mother, she went abroad to try for still higher honors in the famous games at Wimbledon, England, and she was the first American girl to triumph at Wimbledon since 1907. In England tennis is a great social event. Helen Wills played before members of the royal family, and men and women of title, wealth and social position. And soon she was being invited everywhere.

But even then Miss Wills realized that to win at anything requires self-sacrifice. She had won enough honors, it would seem, to satisfy most girls. But she was ambitious. She wanted to become the best woman tennis player in the world, and to do so it was necessary for her to stick to a strict régime, which meant going to bed early and doing without dancing in crowded rooms.

Even when the famous Suzanne Lenglen defeated her, Helen only went to work harder than ever. And when she did have her chance to meet Suzanne a second time she was taken ill with appendicitis—a very bitter disappointment, for she never again had a chance to meet the famous French girl on the courts.

Hard luck seems to run in streaks, and Miss Wills had enough of it for a while really to test her mettle. She came home and was defeated by several American players. People began to say that she was slipping. Had she had less determination, she might have given up, and if she had the story of her life would, no doubt, have been very different.

But she went back to Berkeley, practiced harder than ever, and the next year came back to New York, a new and confident Helen Wills, who not only had learned more about tennis, but who had, with that same marvelous

persistency, wrought a marvelous change in herself. Her shy awkward manner had been overcome; she had developed poise and social graces. She had learned to dress with stunning effect, and had been transformed into a real beauty.

Mr. and Mrs. Moody

Her next trip abroad was a series of dazzling triumphs. She was presented at court, entertained in England, France and Germany. The whole world had heard the story of her courage, her determination, her good sportsmanship. Everywhere she was received like

a princess. But when battles are hard fought victory is more greatly appreciated. Having worked for her triumphs, nothing could spoil Helen.

As one might readily imagine, Miss Wills had many admirers. She told a friend in London, "I have just learned to enjoy myself. When I was only nineteen I was very old, really. But now I am young, like other girls."

Nevertheless, Miss Wills was still too hard at work perfecting her tennis to have much time for social life. Most of her suitors were discouraged.

There was one, however, who had admired her for a long time. He was Frederick S. Moody, from a socially prominent San Francisco family, but it was only when both of them were three thousand miles away from home that he really had a chance to meet her. That was one summer on the Riviera. He suddenly developed a great interest in tennis, and went to all the matches in which Helen played. Soon he and Helen became great friends. They swam together, played together, discovered that they both liked to go to art museums. For another one of Helen's interests was an interest in art, in which she majored at Berkeley University.

It was characteristic of her that she didn't rush into a hasty marriage. For the basis of an enduring love is a capacity for friendship, as well as romance. In fact, not until she had finished school a year later did she get married at all. Then it was a quiet wedding, last Christmas, in the modest little Claremont Chapel, within a block of the Berkeley Tennis Club, the scene of most of her tennis activity.

Not long ago Helen Wills returned to New York, once more to go abroad to defend her title. At the same time she held an exhibition of her paintings. She had been working hard all winter, for she still believes that the only way for a woman to keep young and interesting is to forget herself in something that interests her. She isn't going to be one of these stodgy wives who sit down and fold their hands the minute they have acquired a husband.

Miss Wills, as Mrs. Moody, looked more beautiful and dazzling than ever. And why shouldn't she? Good health and happiness are beauty's best recipe.

Not every girl can be a Helen Wills. But every girl can find one thing she can do well; some one interest in which she can forget herself, and, through it, acquire worthwhile friends, and perhaps find the romance which is the only enduring romance—one founded on mutual tastes, mutual interests, and real friendship.

"Let me take it—you'll spoil your pretty dress," he begged. "I'll carry it myself, thank you," she answered freezingly

Cupid in Overalls

Mildred searched for the little love god, high and low—and all the while he was seeking her!

By Etta Webb

MILDRED THAYER sat in blissful ease beside Burr Bradley as he drove through the mingled sunlight and shadow of the lovely summer afternoon. The near-by river was as still as a mirror reflecting cloud and mountain. The air, sweet with scent of wild cherry, caressed Mildred's young cheeks into brighter bloom. Her brown eyes gazed straight ahead under the brim of her last year's hat, but her red lips smiled. She had forgotten everything but her keen enjoyment in the rare pleasure of motoring.

The car was Burr's own, a low-hung blue and green roadster of an expensive make. From the radiator a slim

silver figure pointed the way to speed and distance.

Burr had just showed Mildred how fast he could go; now he slowed down until the car seemed scarcely to crawl. Driving with one hand, he slid his other arm round Mildred's shoulders and gave her an intent look.

Mildred was disturbed. Under thick dusky lashes she stole a glance at Burr's handsome dark young face. A moment before he had laughed at a frightened hen that he'd come near hitting; now he was strangely grave. Mildred, remembering that Burr was J. B. Bradley's only son and heir, sighed. At that moment Mr. Bradley held a note signed by Mrs. Thayer and backed by Mildred which was soon due, and all the money they had been able to save from necessary expenses would barely pay the collected interest. As custodian of his wife's fortune, Mr. Bradley had a reputation for sometimes being pretty severe with any one to whom he lent money.

"I love you, Mildred," Burr murmured.

Mildred shrugged away his lightly infolding arm. "Don't spoil everything, Burr," she protested.

"You're spoiling everything when you don't reciprocate my affection," Burr said sulkily.

A big black bug whizzed into the car and lit on Burr's knee. He was forced to withdraw his arm from about Mildred and go after the insect, which escaped his vicious smack and went roaring on its way.

"Tumblebugs are awfully thick this year," Mildred said.

Burr gave her a reproachful look.

"Why don't you love me, Mildred?" he insisted.

"I guess I don't know what you mean by love, Burr."

"Doesn't your heart thump, and slow down, and sort of sing whenever you see me? Don't you get all choked up and warm-feeling and shaky when we dance together like we did last night? Don't you dream of me, and wake up planning how soon you can see me again? That's what I do, Mildred."

Mildred shook her head.

"I don't seem to have any of those symptoms," she said gently. "I like you, though."

"That 'll do till I teach you to give me something better." Burr, still driving slowly, looked hungrily at the peachy curve of Mildred's cheek, the way her dark curls cuddled her small pink ear, the downward sweep of her eyelashes. Dare he kiss her? He wondered, recalling the non-success of previous attempts.

"It wouldn't do, Burr," Mildred said firmly. "I want to be sure for my own sake as well as yours."

"How long will it take you to be sure you're sure?"

"I—don't know."

"It didn't take me two minutes. I knew the first time I danced with you, Mildred, that you were different from all the other girls."

"I remember that time!" Mildred exclaimed. "You were dancing with a girl in a swanky green dress—"

"June Sylvester. I left her for you, and I've trailed round after you ever since."

"We've had a lot of good times together," Mildred admitted. "This has been one of them. But you'll have to step on the gas now, Burr. There won't be any dinner cooked at my house unless I get home in the next fifteen minutes."

"I'll take you out to dinner," Burr offered eagerly.

"I couldn't leave mother, Burr."

"Wouldn't she come, too?"

"No. When she's as tired as she'll be to-night she can't make another effort. Maybe her head will ache. It does ache a lot lately."

Burr sighed with defeat, and increased his speed until the blue and green car passed everything on the road.

Ten minutes later Mildred stepped out upon the ancient stone horse block that flanked the curb of the old Thayer house where she and her mother lived alone.

POISED on the stone, Mildred stared at something that was going on in the vacant lot adjoining. "Look, Burr! What are those men doing there?" she demanded in astonishment.

Burr eyed the operations.

"Getting ready to build something, I should say."

"What?" Mildred's voice had an anxious ring. "A bungalow?"

Burr grinned.

"Looks more like it was going to be a filling station."

"Oh, we can't have a filling station right next door! This lovely old neighborhood! Our dear old house!"

Her brown eyes misted with tears. Turning, she ran into the house, too agitated even to remember to say good-by to Burr, who looked after her lingeringly before he drove away.

A few minutes later Mildred had changed to a faded blue cotton frock and was in the kitchen trying to coax the worn-out oilstove to behave. She sliced bread and opened a can of peaches with pretty expert motions.

Thoughts of Burr occupied her mind. Why couldn't she love him? What held her back? Burr was as fit as a fiddle, handsome, generous, usually good-humored. He was the best dancer she'd ever stepped with, and he could think of more ways to keep a girl happy and entertained than any man she'd ever met. Aside from Burr's charming self, he had the great advantage of being heir to several millions. If she married him, her mother wouldn't have to keep on working in the public library. With Mildred that was a big consideration.

"Funny I can't go beyond a certain point in my liking for him," Mildred scolded herself, as she sliced oleomargarine into tiny cubes for the supper table. With interest on indebtedness to pay, they didn't feel they could afford butter.

"Must be something wrong with my heart," she thought. "Sometimes I'm tempted to take a chance. I'm so queer, though. I might hate him afterward."

She laid the dinner table with a fresh cloth.

"No! I don't dare try it without love. What is love, anyway? I'd like to know. I'm certain it's more than heart throbs and blushes and pretty day dreams. I guess it's something that gets hold of you and won't let you go whether you feel it's going to be good for you or not."

Mildred continued to sigh and puzzle over the matter for many days. Meanwhile she played round with Burr, riding in the green and blue roadster, dancing with him, playing tennis with him when she could snatch an hour from her various occupations. With her mother working at the public library and her own hands full with two dancing classes and most of the housework, Mildred was just about the busiest Thayer that had ever lived.

Upon the vacant lot adjoining the old Thayer house rose a pretty little building flanked by two green gas

pumps. Mildred had to see it every time she ran out the back door. Every time she saw it she hated it more.

SHE was hanging dish towels on the clothesline early one morning, when her gaze strayed from the worn checked linen to the obnoxious filling station. Overnight the place had blazed with flower boxes full of gorgeous red geraniums and trailing vines.

With her hands full of clothespins, Mildred stared at this fresh evidence of insolent prosperity present and to come.

"It's lovely," she admitted reluctantly. "It looks like a dear little love nest with its peaked roof, and the fresh green and white paint, and those cunning vine lattices."

Whirling round, she glanced at her poor old home, stark and huge and grim, paint peeling off, curling shingles on the roof, broken window panes, back steps rotting away. Once it had been a noble, dignified dwelling set in the midst of broad green acres, but the land had been sold bit by bit as the Thayer fortunes dwindled.

Mildred and her mother were hanging on to it desperately, refusing to sell the place at the low figure offered by a local garage man. Every time Mrs. Thayer thought of dusty cars being stabled in the great double parlors she broke down and cried.

Meanwhile, Mildred was using the almost bare rooms for her dancing classes.

The girl's eyes filled with rebellion and resentment, but at a sound behind her, she dashed them away. The door of the filling station had opened and a young man stood on the threshold. He was tall, supple, with that straight line from shoulder to heel that means upright, graceful posture. His bare sandy head gleamed in the bright sunlight. His clear gray eyes looked straight into Mildred's, shortening the distance between them.

"Good morning, neighbor!" he called to her.

Mildred made no response.

"Good morning, Miss Thayer!" he tried again.

Mildred turned and walked into the house, her cheeks scarlet, her eyes blazing with anger, her chin at its haughtiest height.

"He can stare at me till his eyes fall out, but I'll never speak to him," she told herself as she gave the back door a slam that loosed the kitchen plaster.

Later, in her room, as she was pulling off her work dress and pulling on the gay lipstick-red crape frock that her pupils loved to see her wear, she peeped through the half closed blinds and saw him mounted on a ladder nailing up a long sign. "Safeguard Gas & Oils. Dan Reddon, Prop." The window was open and she heard him whistling, "The girl I love just can't be bothered with me."

Then the doorbell shrilled and Mildred ran down to admit her first dancing class. For the rest of the morning the old house rang with the music of battered phonograph records and the shuff-shuff of small dancing feet on bare floors.

Everything went wrong. The climax came when four little girls crowded together upon the haircloth-covered sofa. There was a sound of tearing cloth, a creak, a scattering of excelsior stuffing, and the bottom of the sofa collapsed. Four small persons sprang up giggling at the wreck, but Mildred actually turned pale with dismay. She needed that sofa, and there was no way of re-

pairing it unless they sent it to a shop, which they couldn't afford.

MRS. THAYER, small, pale, in shabby black, came home with her tired arms full of gayly jacketed volumes.

"I've got to get these ready to go out when the library opens at two o'clock." Her glance fell upon the wrecked sofa. "Oh! That's too bad," she gasped.

"I'm wondering what I'm going to put in place of it," Mildred said. "The front bedroom upstairs is simply stuffed with furniture, but it's all just such wrecks as that—valuable furniture if it could be fixed up."

"How's the class work?"

Mildred laughed.

"Measles has struck town hard. Mrs. Hoy's taking Wilfred to have his tonsils out. Mrs. Ward says that since the stock crash hit them she can't afford to send the twins after this week. As usual, Mrs. Peak didn't send any money, and I just can't dun the poor little woman."

"We'll have to take things as we find them," Mrs. Thayer sighed.

Mildred laughed again.

"Get ready for lunch, mother. I've got the grandest stew you ever put in your mouth!"

Her mother's worn face brightened.

"What in the world did you find to make the stew out of?" she demanded.

"Parsnips! I found oodles of them in the garden. Must have planted the seed by mistake. As a gardener I have my faults."

Mildred gave a gay spin, kick and prance, and darted off to the kitchen to dish up her stew. As she reached the ancient oil stove her heart sank. The flame had gone out, and the parsnips were not half cooked.

She glanced at the kitchen range.

"Cold as charity's hind leg," she commented. "And not a stick of wood on the premises, not even a box I can split up into fuel. Kerosene I must have, and the nearest kerosene—" She bit her lip, "May as well grin and bear it. Personally, I'd rather go without my lunch than patronize his old filling station, but mother must eat."

She snatched a battered, empty oil can and ran for the Safeguard station.

Dan Reddon, Prop., was filling the gas tank of a huge red moving van. As Mildred stepped foot on the gravel approach he glanced at her, smiled, but kept on with his work.

She stood there, angry and impatient, long black lashes veiling mutinous brown eyes, cheeks scarlet with confusion, red lips tightly closed. The wind riffled her cloudy brown hair, and fluttered lipstick red crape about her pretty knees.

On closer view she found Dan Reddon attractive, she admitted grudgingly. Grease stains on his overalls and hands didn't somehow mar his appearance. His voice had a depth that made Mildred tingle curiously.

"There you are, sir, all fixed up ready to roll. One dollar fifty-six, please."

The van driver gave him a bill and he ran into the office to change it at the cash register. Swiftly he returned, counted the change into the man's hand, dismissed him with a friendly salute, and turned to Mildred.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Thayer. What will you have?" He glanced at the battered can. "Kerosene?"

"What did you think I wanted, fuel for my Rolls-Royce?" Mildred, suddenly ashamed, wished she hadn't said that.

He smiled.

"You'd look nice in a Rolls-Royce," he said.

He took the oil can from her hand and turned to fill it at a great tank that held enough kerosene to cook a thousand parsnip stews. Mildred counted out her coins and had the price ready for him.

"This can's leaking a bit," he said. "I'll carry it home for you."

"I'll carry it myself, thank you."

"I can't let you. You'll get oil on your pretty dress."

Mildred marched home ahead of him.

"Fine old place you have here," Dan remarked as he set the oil can on the back steps.

"It was! Till you came and spoiled it for us!"

"How's that?" Dan looked puzzled.

"Mother and I don't cherish the idea of having a filling station next door to our old family residence."

"I see." Dan nodded gravely. "My firm aims to make their filling stations as unobjectionable as possible. Oscar Trent designs them. He designed the new country club house, the Presbyterian church, and the J. B. Bradley house right here in this locality, as you may know."

Mildred's flaming color faded. It seemed utterly ironic that the man who achieved Bradmore should have been responsible for that eyesore next door.

"You understand, of course, that it's up to me to sell all the gas and oil I can," Dan said quietly. "They pay me to promote trade. I'm sorry if my station offends you, Miss Thayer. Honestly though, I should think a nifty little building like that would be better than a vacant lot covered with weeds and tin cans. It ought to increase the value of your property, seems to me."

Mildred moved forward with a determined air.

"If you'll kindly step aside I'd like to go in, please," she said loftily.

Dan jumped out of her way. Mildred sailed up to the back door and attempted to open it. The door stuck. She put her knee against it and pushed, vainly.

"Let me help you." Dan opened the door easily. "I'm sorry you're mad at me," he urged gently. "I'd like to be friends with you. I think you're the prettiest girl I've ever seen, and the sweetest. Isn't there anything I can do to make you like me, Mildred?"

He even knew her name! It was too much. Mildred turned on him in a fury of exasperation.

"Yes! There's something you can do," she said tartly. "You can put your old filling station in your pocket and walk away with it so I'll never have to see either it or you again as long as I live!"

"You're asking the impossible." Dan's voice was firm. "There are eighty-seven filling stations just like that one scattered through this locality—and we mean to stay." He walked away.

SHE poured kerosene into the empty tank and relit the burner under the stew with hands that shook a little. She felt as if she had made a fool of herself, and the worst thing about it was that she would have to go on seeing him.

Parsnips cook quickly, and the stew was good of its kind, but Mildred had lost her appetite.

"I suppose you're planning to go to the country club dance to-night?" Mrs. Thayer asked as she was leaving.

"Yes. I'm going with Burr Bradley."

"That's nice. Burr's a lovely boy." Mrs. Thayer looked anxiously at her daughter.

"He's certainly everything heart could wish for," Mildred spoke rather explosively.

Mrs. Thayer waited.

"Mother!" Mildred said earnestly. "I wish you'd tell me how to dial in on station L O V E without raising static!"

Her mother smiled.

"That's something you'll have to find out for yourself, dear."

"How—when did you know you were in love with father?" persisted Mildred.

How was she to know when she was in love?

"Well, we'd had a corn roast at the beach. We were all sitting there on the sand watching the moon rise over the water, just a pack of youngsters. Suddenly the boy who was sitting beside me jumped up and left me, and—Jim, your father, took the boy's place. He got hold of my hand and squeezed it. 'Hallie, I love you,' he whispered. 'I'm glad,' I whispered back. 'I love you.' That was all there was to it really. Oh, it was a long time ago, but I remember it just as plain—" Mrs. Thayer started. "Oh, mercy me! I've got to run."

THAT evening Mildred dressed carefully. She could sew as well as dance and cook and garden, and a few yards of maize chiffon bought at a bargain had resulted in an airy little dress. Round her white throat she clasped Grandmother Thayer's topaz necklace, caught up her cloak, and ran downstairs just as Burr's sleek blue and green roadster drew up to the old horse block.

Just as she took her place in the car beside Burr the twin lamps of the filling station poured a flood of light over them. Mildred and Burr were as clearly revealed as if it were broad daylight. The girl caught her breath with annoyance, not so much because of the light as because Dan Reddon stood there watching her.

It was a wonderful dance, stringed music, tall green baskets crammed with spring blossoms, girls in gay frocks, plenty of men to go round. But Burr wouldn't let Mildred dance with anybody else. Hungrily his dark eyes studied the thoughtful face at his shoulder for some sign of love.

"Wake up, little lovely princess! Your prince is here," he whispered.

"This waltz is dreamy, Burr. And then I got up with the birds this morning."

"I'm going to take you to Bradmore some night this week to meet my mother," Burr said meaningly.

"I'm terribly busy putting on a pageant."

"You're sweet in this yellow dress, Mildred. I'd like a talking picture of you. You're the prettiest girl here."

"Oh, no! Look at June Sylvester! She's seen you, Burr. She's making eyes at you!"

"Let her!" Burr laughed comfortably. "I wouldn't trade you for a dozen girls like her—and she knows it, too." His arm tightened round Mildred's slender form.

"Not so close!" Mildred frowned warningly. "It's so hot. Isn't this number ever going to end?"

"I wish it could last forever. I love you so I can't see straight, Mildred!" Burr said passionately.

"All I can think of is how hungry I am," Mildred laughed.

"Hungry! Why didn't you say something about it before? It's a poor prince that can't forage a *parfait* for his fainting princess."

"You needn't stop at *parfait*, Burr."

"I'll fetch you everything I can lay my hands on, baby!"

Mildred gazed after him wistfully as he hurried away. It wasn't food she wanted so much as a chance to get away from him for a moment and think.

Burr returned with two well filled plates. In a secluded corner they sat down to munch.

"Yummy-yum! These sandwiches are good!" murmured Mildred. "What is this stuff they're filled with, Burr?"

"*Pate de foie gras.*" Burr looked at her pityingly. "Poor baby! You don't know one half the good things there are in this world."

The sandwich lost its flavor. Mildred tried the *parfait*, but that went no better. She sighed. What ailed her?

"I'm tired as a little dog that's chased a rabbit clear round the world," she said. "I believe I'd like to go home, to my mother."

In the car she pretended to be too tired to talk. Secretly she was disgusted with herself for her unsportsmanlike behavior. Why couldn't she settle up with Burr once and for all, either take him or leave him?

"I must take him—if I can," she thought.

She paused as she was entering her own door to see Burr drive away. She also saw Dan Reddon in his office, clearly revealed under a sixty watt drop light as he pored over accounts. He was working late to-night.

A gentle voice summoned her as she passed her mother's door. Mildred went into the room.

"Have a nice time?" Mrs. Thayer asked.

"Fine!"

A long pause. Mrs. Thayer waited, hoping that Mildred would have something more to tell.

"Guess I'll tumble into my little downey, mother," Mildred said. "See you in the morning!"

That was all. It was a long time before either mother or daughter slept.

NEXT morning Mildred came out of her back door at an early hour carrying a gay green basket whose festive look concealed the fact that it was intended only to hold such things as bread, hamburg steak, and onions.

Dan Reddon was opening up the filling station for trade. He spoke to her. She gave him a curt nod, but her heart pounded, her cheeks burned, she was conscious in every fiber of her being of clear gray eyes watching her. What was there about the man that made her heart cut up so? She tried to think of Burr, still lazily abed at Bradmore—and failed.

Burr called Mildred at noon. She came back to the lunch table slightly breathless.

"Burr wants to take me out to Bradmore to meet his mother to-night," she said.

"Of course you're going!" Mrs. Thayer's thin cheeks flushed.

"Yes." Suddenly Mildred caught her mother's hand and kissed it. "If I marry Burr there'll be no more hard-

ships for you, darling!" she said brokenly.

"Never mind me. It's you, Mildred. If you love Burr it's the nicest thing that could ever happen to you."

"But if I don't love him?"

Mrs. Thayer scanned her daughter's pleading face.

"We won't talk about anything so unspeakably horrible as a loveless marriage, dear."

"It wouldn't be loveless if—if one of the persons cared."

"Both must care, frightfully." There was a long pause. "Mrs. Bradley came into the library this afternoon. She has never been there before. I—I think she wanted to see what I looked like."

"She saw a sweet little mother-person," Mildred said quickly. "What did you see, mother?"

"She's handsome. And I never saw such clothes in all my life. Burr is like her, I think."

That ended the conversation.

Mildred dreaded her ordeal. When Burr came for her that evening she went forth as to sacrifice. She had told herself sternly that if she passed the reviewing stand successfully she would marry Burr.

The twin lamps of the Safeguard filling station illuminated the night. Dan Reddon was feeding gas to a battered flivver. He didn't look their way, but Mildred knew he saw them.

Burr was silent, saving up, Mildred suspected unhappily, for what was to come.

She had always thrilled at the sight of Bradmore, and imagined how it would seem to visit there, live there. But when Burr whirled in between lamplit gate posts with the possessive manner of the heir apparent, she went suddenly cold and uncaring.

Burr parked his roadster on the drive, jumped out and offered his hand to Mildred. He flung his soft gray hat on the car seat. Bareheaded, he led Mildred up the broad front steps to the door. They entered unannounced.

A great dog rose from a rug and came to greet his master. Burr patted the animal's head. "Hope you and Ivan'll like each other, Mildred," he said casually.

The dog followed them as they trailed through room after room, each more gorgeous than the last, till they came to the sun parlor rich with flowers and lamp glow. A slender, dark woman in sheer, trailing black rose from a chaise longue to greet them. She kissed Burr and gave Mildred a cool white hand, upon which gleamed a single startling ruby ring. Her eyes, dark like Burr's, but ever so much keener, swept Mildred from head to foot.

Mrs. Bradley returned to her chaise longue, Mildred sat down, and Burr perched on the edge of a table, helping himself to a cigarette from his mother's jeweled cigarette box.

BEFORE the situation could become more embarrassing for Mildred than it already was, guests appeared. June Sylvester, radiant in a sequined blue frock that made her black hair gleam like fresh lacquer, led a group of her friends nonchalantly into the sun parlor.

In a moment the scene had changed. Everybody except Mildred, was laughing, moving about. Mrs. Bradley rang for Jerrold, her stately butler, who appeared as by magic. Rugs were rolled up and the floor cleared for dancing. The radio was turned on.

Burr danced with Mildred who felt

conspicuous and out of place in her little sleeveless white frock which had recently been cleaned and from which rose a faint odor of gasoline. She thought it was the smell of the gasoline that brought Dan Reddon's face so clearly before her.

June flirted outrageously with every man in the room, Burr included. There was a freemasonry between the whole bunch that Mildred found it impossible to enter into.

She realized sadly that Burr had always had everything his mother could hand to him. He could have her in the same way, not because she was suitable, but because he wanted her.

A maid in uniform brought a tray of pink ices and sparkling frosted glasses. Mildred was a little afraid of the beverage which made her tingle queerly. She thought that everybody was livelier afterward.

Mildred felt the keen eyes of Burr's mother upon her and trembled

It ended at last. She was glad to be in the car with the cool night wind blowing into her flushed face. Just outside the town Burr drove up under a group of trees and stopped the car.

He took something from his pocket. Then he snatched Mildred's left hand

and putting it to his mouth, acted as if he were going to eat it up with kisses. Startled, Mildred attempted to get her hand away, but he held it firmly, trying to put a ring on her finger. Mildred shut her hand into a tight little fist.

"Where'd you get that ring?" She said the first thing that came into her head.

"Borrowed it from mother." Burr was intent on uncurling the slim, stubborn fingers. Again he lifted Mildred's hand to his lips; this time he nibbled it.

"I'll bite you good and hard if you don't let me put this ring on your finger," he said.

Mildred unclosed her hand and Burr slipped the ring upon her third finger.

"It's far too big," Mildred murmured. "See! It falls off. I'd lose it in no time." Her thoughts were spinning, trying to focus.

"Who'd think mother's hand was so much bigger than yours?" Burr wondered. "You like diamonds, don't you, Mildred?"

"They're rather hard and cold, like ice." Mildred shivered a little.

"Maybe you'd rather have rubies or sapphires. It's all the same to me, long's you're suited."

"I don't want any ring, Burr."

"Why, you've got to have a ring, the symbol of our engagement!"

"I'm not engaged to you, Burr."

"But you're going to be!"

"No." Mildred's voice was faint but firm.

"What's the matter, Mildred? Are you jealous of June?"

"I'm not jealous of anybody. I don't love you, Burr."

"You don't have to love me. I love you enough for two."

"That won't do. I'd find love necessary, like warmth, food, clothing. I shouldn't be happy. I couldn't make you happy unless I loved you, and I don't."

"Mother married dad without loving him. She had money, he had brains. It was a good arrangement for both. She loves him now. You'll do the same."

Burr tried to take Mildred in his arms, but she pushed him away.

"Don't, Burr! Please. You don't know how strongly I feel about this. I guess I'd die if you kissed me. I'm ashamed, I'm sorry, but I can't help it." Her breath came in long sobs.

BURR sat back in his corner of the car. He was mad clear through. He, Burr Bradley, heir to his mother's millions, had offered himself to this little nobody only to be spurned! For the first time in his life he'd failed to get what he wanted when he wanted it. He'd expected Mildred to be dazzled by Bradmore, to purr with bliss over the valuable diamond ring, but she had hurt, disappointed him.

He took something else from his pocket, a slip of paper.

"Here's that note you and your mother gave my father when you borrowed money of him last fall," he said, harshly.

Mildred controlled her astonishment.

"How'd you get it?" she asked.

"That's my business. This note is due to-morrow, Mildred. I happen to know my father won't renew it. He'll demand full payment, because he doesn't think he's well secured. You're dated up for a hot little time with dad to-morrow, unless you've got your money handy."

Mildred trembled with dismay. She didn't have the money handy and she didn't know where they could get money —unless they sold their home, and that

couldn't be done in a minute, not soon enough to help them, anyway.

"Say you'll marry me, Mildred, and I'll destroy this paper." Burr made a motion to tear the note into bits.

Mildred caught his arm to stop him.

"That belongs to your father!" she cried sharply. "Put it back where you found it."

"Promise you'll marry me, Mildred!" Burr's tones were softly persuasive. "I'll see to it that my father doesn't make you any trouble."

Mildred sat in silence, struggling with anger, contempt. Burr's attempt to force her consent revealed him to her as nothing else could.

"Well?" Burr demanded, leaning close, his arm ready to clasp her.

Mildred's eyes blazed as she looked at him. She hated him.

"I wouldn't marry you to save my life!" she exclaimed.

With a quick movement she wrenched open the car door. Before Burr could stop her she jumped out. Like a hare pursued by hounds she ran. Turning into an alley she gained the side street behind her own house. She climbed the tumbledown fence and, safe in her own yard, paused to catch her breath.

THE twin lights of the filling station were out, but Dan Reddon was in the office at work on his books. She could see him clearly under the drop light inside the window.

A car without lights stole softly up the street and stopped. From the car slipped a dark figure, which swiftly became lost in the shadows.

Dan rose, switched off his light and came out. Mildred heard the jingle of keys as he turned, flashlight in hand, to lock the door.

A man, who had evidently been skulking in the shadow, leaped forward.

"Dan! Look out!" The full meaning of the scene burst upon Mildred, and she screamed at the top of her voice.

Her warning came too late. Dan was already in a clinch with his assailant.

Mildred ran to the spot. She had no weapon, but with rare presence of mind she found the switch outside the office door. A flood of light resulted, and the bandit fled in his car, but not before Mildred had got a good look at him, as well as his number plate.

She turned to Dan. He leaned against a pump, his left hand gripped round his right arm near the shoulder. Blood ran down his sleeve, dripped upon the gravel.

"He had a knife," Dan muttered. "Got my bag of money. Call—police."

Mildred ran to the office telephone and sent in two calls, one to the police, one to the nearest doctor. Returning to Dan she tried to staunch the flow of blood with her scarf.

Mrs. Thayer had heard Mildred's scream and now came running.

Within five minutes the doctor and the police were there. Dan was whisked to the hospital with an ugly knife thrust through his right arm.

For a few days there was some anxiety lest Dan have infection, but clean blood aided, and he began to mend. The bandit was captured, thanks to Mildred's description and her memory of the car number.

Mildred and Dan exchanged many telephone messages while he was in the hospital. Contrary to Mildred's expectation Mr. Bradley did renew the note which he found in his desk next morning. Burr made an effort to see Mildred, but without avail.

One day when she was taking some daffodils to Dan at the hospital she saw Burr with June Sylvester beside him in the blue and green car. She smiled scornfully.

The next afternoon a long black car with silver wheels driven by a chauffeur drew up before the Thayer house just as Mildred, in the lip stick red crape, was seeing the last of her dancing class to the door. Dan, pale but smiling, his right arm in a sling, came up the steps.

"Oh, you got out sooner than you expected!" Mildred exclaimed joyfully.

"Yes. I'm going to have a three months' vacation abroad, Milly. What do you think of that?"

"I think it's nice." But Mildred's heart collapsed like a balloon that's been stepped on.

Dan stepped into the hall. He took Mildred's hand.

"Milly, I love you," he said simply. "Will you marry me and go with me?"

"Oh, Dan!" The little cry was enough. Dan understood. He gathered Mildred close.

"Wish I had my other arm," he sighed.

Mildred put both her arms round his neck.

They stood there for long moments absorbed in tender contact, their first kiss, whispering nothings. Then Dan lifted his head and looked down into Mildred's starry eyes.

"Milly," he said gently, "I'm not a regular pump handler. My father is president of the Safeguard Oil Company, and I've been learning the business from the ground up so I could manage affairs when he retired. That's father's car and chauffeur out there. You see, we're pretty well off. Are you mad because I didn't tell you sooner?"

Mildred drew a long breath.

"I was counting on cooking your meals and patching your overalls," she said softly. "I don't know that it makes any difference. I could be happy either way, just so long as I had you! Oh, Dan!"

Lover's Quarrel

THE cruel things we say, my dear,
Cause more than mortal pain.
Yet nothing brings us quite so near
As making up again.

—*Katherine Metcalf Roof*

"I've always loved you, Princess. That's why I came back"

Revelation of Love

Like every other girl, she had often asked herself, "How will I know when I'm in love?"

By Daisy Dean

AVIS reclined on her side of the love seat and regarded Van Roselle through half-closed dreamy eyes, still trembling from his kisses, which wafted her to a world of detached enchantment and left her shaky and speechless.

Van lit a cigarette with unperturbed deliberation. Presently he would say something casual and far removed from his beautiful love making, she knew. Also he would not kiss her again to-night—even when he left. This brought a stab of disappointment.

His artistic, perfect love making moved her strangely, yet left him aloof and personal. Queer—this glowing thing between them. Avis, nineteen and practically engaged to Ed, thought it a weird, uncanny fascination she could not resist. With a quick hot shame admitted she did not try. She had shunned promiscuous kissing, as she had all forms of irrational modernism—before meeting Van.

Van finished lighting his cigarette, slumped down in the love seat, and stretched black patent leather oxfords

toward the glowing logs in the fireplace. As long as he had been kissing Avis, which was each time they had been propitiously alone during his three months in Princeville, he had never alluded to the subject afterward.

Avis did not understand this tall, slender fellow with the artistic white hands, whose touch made her soul flame. It couldn't be love, yet the spell he cast over her was irresistible.

"WHY don't you smoke, Avis?" he inquired lazily, apropos of nothing. "It's nice and chummy—to smoke."

Well, why didn't she? Avis floundered around trying to find a clever answer; then stuttered out a couple of inadequate "I—I's."

"Think it immoral or something moss covered like that?"

No, she truly didn't. It was really because Ed, while as modern as other twenty-one year old boys, didn't want his girl to smoke. But she refrained from telling this.

"I don't believe," she answered softly, "I ever gave it a second thought. I've never had a desire to smoke—that's all." She tried to take her thoughts dutifully back to Ed, but Van broke through with his hearty, masculine laugh.

Leaning his head with the wealth of blue-black hair against the back of the love seat, he regarded her teasingly, revealing even white teeth. "You don't go in for things you don't like—is that it, Princess?"

"Why do you call me that absurd name, Van?"

"You remind me of a—princess. You differ extremely from other girls here in Princeville. Princess of Princeville! As before mentioned you do only that which you like to do, yet manage to make yourself very popular. Usually the center of attention. In this day and age only a princess at heart could accomplish that. But you are guilty of one modern sin, Princess."

"What?" Avis inquired too eagerly, hoping he would discuss the modern manner she permitted herself to be kissed—by him. Waiting, she avoided the charm of the searching gray eyes beside her and gazed into the fire.

"You have that modern thing called 'it,'" Van said and from the side of her eyes she saw him rise to his feet. "I am going now, Princess."

Disappointment at his explanation of her modern sin coupled with his leaving caused her to say: "Oh."

"Where did you park the long black ulster?"

He had a way of making even coats seem interesting, alive things.

Van slipped into the coat, his mysterious gray eyes intent on her flushed face.

Avis wondered why she felt that the spice and sparkle of the world was going with him.

"Good night, Princess," he whispered at the door—that was all. Avis returned to the living room, to the love seat before the fire, feeling desolate and alone—trying to understand herself. She spoke aloud in her eagerness:

"I can't understand it—I hate myself for letting him kiss me—yet I can't help it. He makes love so beautifully—so differently—like one's dreams. When Ed kisses me he squeezes too tight, musses my hair and dresses, makes me impatient, smears my rouge. But I love to run my fingers through his blond curls and hold his head against my heart—Ed's so dear and boyish—I *must* be in love with Ed—and I *am* going to marry him of

course. Yet I wonder—when I'm married, doing my housework and being old and prosaic, will I dream of the man who called me 'Princess' and made love so wonderfully?"

Avis sighed. This was Tuesday evening. No, to be exact it was now Wednesday morning. Wednesday evening was Ed's regular date night. She feared a scene. Ed, aware of Van's attentions, was becoming jealous—and Ed jealous was an unreasonable baby.

Avis watched the logs burn down, turned out the living room lights, tiptoed in to ascertain that her aunt, who had raised her, was still sleeping, then went quietly to her own orchid trimmed bedroom. Sleeping, she dreamed of and trembled to the memory of Van's kisses.

ED arrived Wednesday evening with a huge box of candy, and a dark scowl. His blond, blue-eyed face looked as ferocious as possible. He was mad—good and mad—and his jealousy showed in his manner of stalking about the living room.

"Let's take a ride," he almost ordered.

Avis's small cousins, Jane and Bob, were waiting with ill concealed anxiety for the usual game of cards she and Ed played Wednesday nights with the kiddies.

"Yes, Ed. Wait until I get my coat and hat."

At these words the youngsters tramped back to the dining room dragging out their school books with noisy disappointment.

Avis stood studying herself before the mirror. Yes, she did look like a princess. She couldn't help noticing her quite obvious beauty: chin rounded and firm—gardenia white skin—deep pansy eyes—lips beautifully formed—for kisses—hair the shade of auburn most girls crave.

Since meeting Van she no longer seemed nineteen and naïve. Instead she felt years older than adorable, mad faced, blue-eyed Ed. Her love for him tinged on the maternal as she slipped into the gray squirrel coat and the gray felt hat.

Deciding to be patient she seated herself in the roadster. Ed didn't speak until they were on their way and the crisp air fanned their cheeks.

"Avis, you've been seeing a lot of this fellow Van."

"Why shouldn't I see him if I want to?"

"You're my girl, aren't you? Haven't we been going steady for two years—since you were seventeen?"

"Yes, but you took Mary Walsh to a party once and you took Elsie Eldan out riding twice."

"I explained all that to you, Avis—you know it. You're just saying that in self defense. Why, you've been with Van every night you haven't been with me. Do you take me for a chump, Avis?"

"Oh, Ed, don't be silly."

"You call it silly for Dick to go by your house and see Van leaving after midnight? To have him kid me about it? If you're in love with this Van guy why don't you say so—are you, Avis?"

"No." Avis breathed a sigh of relief, believing her answer quite truthful. She wasn't in love with Van—it was just an overpowering attraction.

"Why let him hang around then, honey? He's too old for you in the first place."

"He—he's interesting and I rather like him. Why can't I have a friend if I want to? You and I aren't engaged, Ed."

"You know it isn't that I don't want to be. We're both young and I'm learning a trade. I know I'm only making twenty dollars a week and even in this town that's not much. How can I tie you down to a promise? You know I love you and it is understood between us. I wouldn't mind your having friends if you'd pick on some one else. I don't like that guy Van."

"Why?" sudden curiosity assailing her. "Jealous?"

"Naturally I'm jealous, but that isn't all. I don't trust him, somehow. He must be nearly thirty—too old to play around with a girl of your age. I trust you, Avis, but not him. He's a confirmed bachelor and a wanderer just visiting Princeville to waste time. I wish he'd stay away from our crowd. Just on account of he and Jack being cousins the gang all like him, but I don't."

"Oh, well," Avis reached over and patted the hand on the steering wheel, "he's interesting, nevertheless—but let's not quarrel over him, Ed."

He leaned back and kissed her quickly on the cheek. "You won't see him any more, honey?"

"No," whispered Avis, doubting herself even as she gave the promise.

She would have to see Van at parties and dances, naturally, but she knew that wasn't what Ed meant.

LATE Thursday afternoon the phone rang. Avis trembled, sensing it was Van. So she wasn't surprised to hear his voice as she held the receiver in breathless anticipation. She would tell Van "no."

He laughed teasingly across the wire.

"I'm coming over, Princess, if I may."

Avis was surprised to find her own voice calmly answering:

"You may; I'll expect you about eight."

While Avis was dressing that evening her aunt came into her room, wearing a worried expression.

"Avis, you mean as much to me as my own child," she said, "and I want you to be happy. There is nothing like a fine steady husband, and Ed is a nice boy. We don't know much about this Van Roselle—and aren't you seeing a mite too much of him, dear?"

Avis clasped and unclasped the hooks on her green velvet dress. Dear auntie. She meant well. She had raised her to believe in a sane, sensible love and to shun all attractions which were not so defined. Avis was trying to be worthy of her aunt's teachings.

"Don't worry, auntie," she said quietly, "I'm not seeing Van after to-night."

"That's fine, dear. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush you know, Avis."

"Yes, I know."

In spite of this the moment Van entered the room Avis felt the old fire stealing through her veins, like flame upon ice.

"Let me take the long black ulster," she said shakily.

"Not to-night. I've borrowed a chariot from Jack so the Princess and I may go dancing."

Avis, knowing she shouldn't go, at once permitted his suggestion to become her most ardent desire.

A flushed starry-eyed Avis greeted her from the mirror as she slipped into her gray squirrel coat and gray hat.

They drove to a charming road house some three miles out of Princeville, where Van regarded her through thoughtful gray eyes as he smoked

numerous cigarettes. They ordered sandwiches which they barely touched, and danced every number.

Dancing with Van was wonderful—like a dream. His arms holding her close as they kept step in rhythmic ecstasy was akin to the love making which Avis anticipated with quivering longing and bated breath. As they lost track of a prosaic world, dancing together, Avis told herself she was not going to let Van kiss her to-night.

About eleven they started home—reluctantly, and when Van parked the car on a road known as "Lover's Lane," Avis made no visible protest. She was once more under the spell of him, but she promised herself it would be the last time, for to-night was really a silent farewell.

Van held her close in his arms and pressed his lips against hers with irresistible persuasion—speaking not one word. Avis felt suddenly that she must tell him why she permitted him to kiss her. She made a futile attempt.

"Van—I—you—we—"

"Dearest, what is it?" he inquired; then when she couldn't answer, he kissed her again. His "dearest" had been like rich wine going to her head—oh, why did she feel like this about Van?

Suddenly Avis heard a boyish oath ring through the night air and had a quick vision of Ed's face at the window of the car.

"Come out and fight like a man, you damned sneak," he cried to Van.

"Ed—Ed—" Avis hardly recognized her own voice.

Van remained unperturbed as, stepping from the car, he leaned against the door and considered Ed quietly.

"Don't be a fool. What's wrong?"

"You know what's wrong! Parked on Lover's Lane with my girl! You dirty cad, sneaking off with her and daring to make love like this."

"You're being rather bumptious, aren't you? I did not sneak Miss Varden off; she came of her own free will—and the love making is our own private affair. However, if you have a claim on her and she wishes to acknowledge it that's a different matter. It's entirely up to Miss Varden."

"You know damn well she's my girl," shouted Ed.

"I assure you I did not know that. If Miss Varden admits it she may leave with you—at once."

"Yeah?" scoffed Ed. "Just go ahead and ask her, then."

Van turned to Avis, trembling in the car. "What do you wish to do, Princess?"

Avis closed her eyes against the look in Van's face, longing with every fiber of her being to remain with him. Her duty was with Ed, she thought—Ed who wanted to marry her—loved her. Van at the most was only fascinated the same as she—yet it tore her heart as she whispered:

"I had no right to come to-night, Van. You see—I am—engaged in a manner—to Ed."

"Then," replied Van quietly, "please accept my apologies."

Avis felt like thirty cents as she transferred herself to Ed's roadster. Ed drove in silent, white-lipped contemplation while Avis sobbed wildly beside him. He followed her into the big quiet living room with the comfort of its blazing logs.

"You broke your promise," he flung at her accusingly.

"I'm sorry. You'll never understand—never."

"Understand what, Avis? Are you in love with him?"

"I came with you, didn't I?"

"Yes, you came with me, all right. But was to-night the first time he kissed you?"

"No," head bent, "it wasn't. He has—before."

"Avis—if you can let another man kiss you like he was kissing you you certainly aren't in love with me. I'm through."

"Ed, I'll never see him again and—I'm sorry."

"I'll never be able to understand it, Avis, but I'm crazy about you so I'll try and forget. You can see how much he thought of you when he wouldn't even come out and fight like a man."

Avis looked at him as he sat there, boyishly petulant.

"I'd have killed him if it hadn't been for you. We're going to be truly engaged from this minute on, Avis. I'll buy you a diamond for your birthday."

"You're sweet, Ed—I'll love it." She permitted his taking her into ardent young arms and kissing her more possessively than ever before. But she waited passively for release.

THROUGH Jack she learned that Van had gone to New York and with him went the spice and sparkle of life. She kept this buried within herself and went about quietly collecting embroidered things for her hope chest. Ed was to receive a raise in the fall—and they would be married on Christmas day.

Two months went slowly by. May found Avis and Ed with the rest of the crowd at the club's big festival.

Avis, glorious in apple green chiffon, was dancing with Tubby and listening to his joke about a Scotchman. They paused to laugh near the club entrance; then the smile left Avis's lips.

Framed in the doorway, debonair, mysterious gray eyes on her face, stood Van. He stepped toward them.

"Hello, Princess," he said, "will you dance with me?"

"Why—yes—Van—" she glanced at Tubby, who good-naturedly allowed Van to cut in.

Giving herself into his arms, Avis looked quickly and nervously about for Ed.

"When did you come back, Van?" she whispered, her heart pounding.

"To-day. I purchased a garage at the north end of town. Jack will run it with me, so I'm here this time to stay. Glad—Princess?"

Glad? Her heart beat into her throat. Her lips quivered. She didn't know whether this was gladness or chagrin. What good would his returning do her? She could never see him—alone—never be able to kiss him again. She was definitely engaged to Ed, yet renewed feeling for Van was stealing like molten fire through her body. She let him hold her tightly, even after she had glimpsed the surprised anger in Ed's eyes, over Sally Lane's shoulder.

The music intermingled with this detached, breath-taking feeling. Once again the old sweet thrill went through her as the orchestra played softly:

"And I'll be there with you, when my dreams come true."

What did Van have to do with her dreams? Nothing, really. Ed was to be the realization of them, yet she she longed once more to have Van kiss her.

"Princess, are you glad? You didn't answer."

"Yes, I'm glad, Van. You may dance at my wedding—I'm to be married Christmas." She laughed up at him nervously.

"I always intended to dance at your

wedding, Princess. It will be a pleasure."

Avis wanted to cry with disappointment.

He bowed abruptly at the conclusion of the dance and left her. A moment later Ed found her, his blue eyes blazing.

"What's he doing back here?"

"Don't be a baby all your life, Ed. Van bought a garage at the north end of town. He and Jack are going to run it."

"Confidential, wasn't he?"

"Ed, you're silly. He had to talk, didn't he? Besides he said he would be pleased to dance at our wedding."

"Yeah?" replied Ed, leading Avis to the dance floor. "Well, he won't if I know it."

"He's here to stay, so you'll have to be friends with him," said Avis; then added weakly, "he—he must have a great deal of money, buying that garage."

"He ought to have money. What's so wonderful about that? I'll have money, too, when I'm thirty."

Avis changed the subject.

Van did not dance with her again that evening. He shook hands with Ed who returned the greeting with undeniable sulkiness.

Van danced incessantly with Sally Lane and a fierce uncontrollable jealousy possessed Avis; why, she did not know.

VAN was constantly with their fun-loving crowd after this. Avis saw him often and found herself awaiting his presence with bated breath. When he entered a room it immediately loomed rose-colored. The spice returned to her life, yet beyond a casual word or glance he did not seek her out.

However, the deep gray eyes whispered a caress when he looked at her. They told, plainer than words, that he wanted to kiss her as much as she desired to be kissed. Avis knew he, too, was under the spell. Sometimes he took Sally home, but usually left alone. He played the piano divinely. For this reason alone he was welcome everywhere, and even Ed admitted he wasn't such a bad sort when you knew him.

When Van was not present, Avis felt the evening going stale on her, felt a quick impatience to be home. Odd, that a man could so hold her in his spell she couldn't overcome it. She lay awake at night giving herself over to reluctant dreams of him.

She told herself her happiness lay with Ed and sought surcease by allowing Ed to hold and kiss her as Van had. She tried to feel the same sweet detachment and failed miserably. So she gave up trying and resorted to her old way of rumpling Ed's curls teasing, playing and laughing with him. Ed was just a wonderful pal.

This was love as it should be, she assured herself; as her aunt had always taught her to believe. When she married Ed and the years went by, this fascination for Van would die a complete and natural death. Of course.

The first bright Sunday in June the crowd gave a picnic. Seven machines full of laughing youth traveled the twenty miles to Melvin's Grove, where there was all the usual picnic enticements of boating, swimming, climbing, games and dancing.

Avis, bright-eyed and jaunty in a deep blue sport outfit, gave quick surreptitious glances back to the car where Sally rode beside Van.

"I wish they'd leave Van out of things," Ed said grumpily.

"Still jealous?"

"It isn't that—but I never will really like him."

Avis from the depths of a strange understanding did not reply. She contented herself with singing snatches of popular songs during the rest of the ride to Melvin's Grove.

Just before they turned into the park Ed reached over and covered her hand. "Happy, aren't you, honey? All over that fascination business for Van, aren't you?" His voice was doubtful.

Avis laughed on a tremulous note and answered, "Oh, of course."

The day was a mellow romantic one. It cast a glamorous spell over Avis and she found herself looking into Van's deep gray eyes—too often. Knew Ed was noticing these glances and getting angry.

She couldn't help it somehow. Van made everything seem so worth while—even commonplace things he did. When he unpacked the big lunch hamper, she, too, wanted to unpack hampers. And while they were both pulling the things out of its spacious depths, his hand inadvertently touched hers. Once again that old feeling went singing about her heart, along her veins.

WHEN evening came she waited eagerly for the dancing, praying Van would, hoping he wouldn't, dance with her. Dutifully she fought her longing for him, but to no avail.

Van danced with her in the easy natural sequence of changing partners, and it happened to be a "Moonlight number."

One moment the floor was a blue flame—a red flame—then a totally dark place with only the stars above and the sparkle of the beach beside them.

Van drew her close—closer—as if he, too, felt this madness, and her heart thumped wildly against his. He led her off the dance floor through a small inclosure, out behind a white pillar.

Wordlessly, gray eyes looked into pansy ones, then Van shook his head gently. He started to lead her back, when Avis cried out:

"Kiss me, Van—kiss me."

The sound of her voice in her own ears brought shame. This was terrible, but she couldn't help it. Too late now to take it back, for with a cry of triumph he held her as of old—lips gently meeting hers, like a beautiful flame, with tender persuasion. She had not dreamed this sweet elation; it was—real—real—

"Oh, Princess, Princess," Van whispered, a catch in his voice.

Wordlessly he led her back to the dance floor. Lights blazed at them and Avis closed her eyes as she followed step to a giddy wailing tune.

When she opened her eyes, attempting to control her emotions, she saw Ed with an angry gleam in his eyes.

Later he faced Avis with rage and accused her of knowing the dance with Van was to be a moonlight number.

"Ed, please," protested Avis.

When it came time to go home Ed was in a sullen, reckless mood. Avis wanted to cry, blaming herself for his wild actions. Now perhaps she would control this maddening feeling for Van.

Jack ordered the arrangements.

"I'll drive Ed's roadster, Avis. You and Ed get in the rear seat of Van's car."

It was anything but an agreeable arrangement. Avis hated Sally sitting up in front beside Van. She hated Ed's black, wild eyes.

Van, too, was upset, absorbed in far-away thoughts. So he didn't see the other car coming toward them on the narrow road, until it was too late to avoid a smash.

There was a crash as if the very heavens themselves were splintering and then Avis was lying somewhere out in the open, sobbing and calling one name.

"Van—Van—oh, Van—" she cried out, fighting the wave of on-creeping unconsciousness.

AVIS, opening her eyes, smelled ether.

"You're all right," a voice was telling her, "you're all right, Avis. You were thrown from the car and your arm is broken. You got a bad bump on the head, too. But don't worry, you'll be all right."

Avis felt her arm. Yes, it was in a sling. Her head pained terribly—that, too, was bandaged. She moved her legs about. They were all right, thank goodness. Van—oh, Van—was this Van?

She looked up toward the voice—and into Ed's worried blue eyes.

"You—you're not hurt, Ed? I'm glad—and—Van—the others?"

"You were the only one hurt—and thank God it wasn't worse. Van's new car is a wreck. It was the other fellow's fault. He was driving along that narrow road at a furious pace without lights—poor old Van!"

Avis regarded Ed critically. Somehow he looked different. Older. Grown up. There was a mannish look to him now—a look she had never seen before.

"It was—terrible," she whispered.

Ed bit his lip. "And all my fault you were hurt, Avis. I was blinded with jealousy when I saw you and Van dance behind that pillar—when you danced back with a rapt look in your eyes. If I'd behaved, I'm sure there wouldn't have been an accident. But I'll never do it again, Avis."

Silently Avis began to cry.

"Listen, Avis," Ed said gently, "don't cry—and don't feel badly. It's Van you love and not me. There isn't any use going on with me, for you will never care for me as you should. Avis—I guess you have loved him all along, don't you understand?"

Avis looked up through her tears, starting to protest it was just fascination. Suddenly she knew Ed was telling the truth—she had loved Van all along. What she mistook for fascination was—love.

The tears rolled down her cheeks as she remembered her first thought during that crash had been for—Van.

Poor Ed. What could she say?

"Yes," she sighed, "I do love Van. I'm fond of you, too, Ed, but in a different way—"

"I know, Avis, dear," Ed whispered, "I understand. You can't help it. I knew you loved him all along, and I wasn't man enough to face it. All the time you were unconscious you cried out for him. You've tried to be square about it, Avis. Too square. We'll always be the best of friends—all of us—Avis. It's Van you want."

Avis shook her head gently. "Even so, Ed, Van doesn't want me."

"Yes he does, Princess."

Avis turned at the words and the magic sound of Van's voice.

On the other side of the hospital bed, patiently silent, stood Van. They looked long and searchingly into each other's eyes, unaware that Ed slipped quietly out, leaving them alone.

Van took her free hand in his and sat down on the bed.

"I've always loved you, Princess. That's why I came back—for good—to be near you. I had to be near you, dear."

"Van, you never said—anything—when you kissed me—"

He looked at her with tender gray eyes.

"Avis, you weren't sure of yourself, darling. You liked me to kiss you—and I knew how it made us both feel. Being older, I understood you thought you should marry Ed. That night in Lover's Lane you made a choice. If you had chosen me I would have spoken—but you didn't.

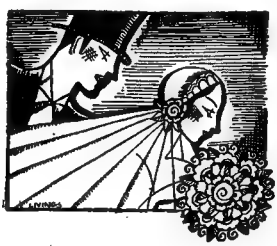
"After I went away I realized what you meant to me, Princess. It was more than I thought. In the beginning I fancied it might be just—fascination. To-night, Avis, when you asked me to—kiss you—I knew you loved me as much as I loved you."

"Van, dear, we've been a couple of sillies. I know now you mean the world to me—life without you would be impossible. It's been love from the first moment—"

"I know that, now, Princess," he answered, "and as soon as you recover, you're going to be my Princess forever—"

Reaching down, he gently held her like a flower as his lips closed on hers once again, tenderly, with that sweet persuasion.

Avis, willingly under his spell, now, knew it was not fascination, but—*love*.



When Love Comes

WHEN Love comes early he but finds
Dread, molten flames, as when the world was young,
Heart-walls unbuilt, heart-vows unformed, unsung,
Heart visions murky—for new passion blinds.

When Love comes tardily and over-late
He comes upon his temples all laid low,
And shells of memories bereft of glow;
A tearful scene, a sad caprice of Fate.

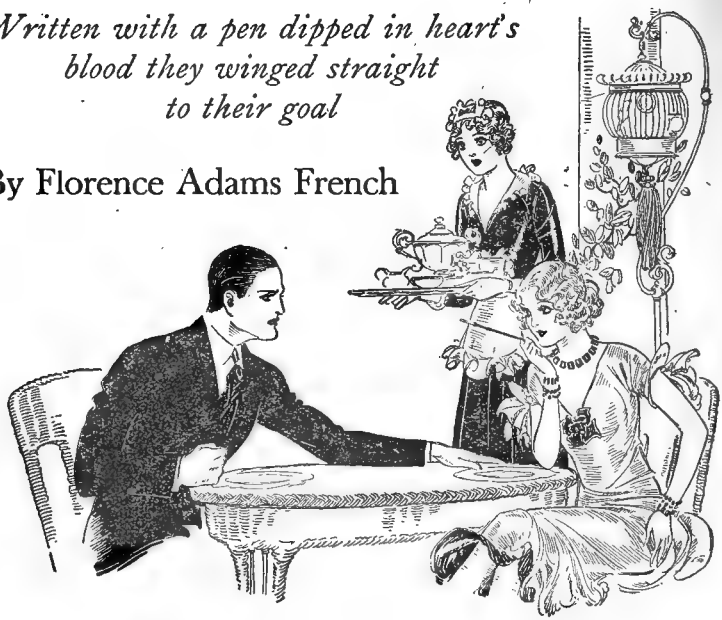
To-day is warm. The scent of lilac bough
Lies all about my window where I gaze,
For I am watching down the wooded ways
And softly praying, "Love—dear Love—come now!"

—*Roscoe Gilmore Stott*

Love Letters

Written with a pen dipped in heart's blood they winged straight to their goal

By Florence Adams French



"The things you wrote meant all the world to me! The letters—"
"Oh, bother those letters," Jacquilyn interrupted

"DO you like to write letters?" Jacquilyn Winters, a famous motion picture star, unexpectedly asked her maid.

"Why, yes—I believe I do," was Laurel Danford's reply.

Jacquilyn hesitated a moment, then said with a wry little smile, "Don Du-Frayne has left town for several weeks —going on location. He insists that I write to him—well, nearly every day. I hate to write letters. I never can think of anything to say. I—I was thinking perhaps I could get you to write to him for me."

Laurel paused in her work in astonishment. Write letters to Don! Don who was continually in her own thoughts—to have him hold in his own dear hands and read letters that she had written to him; to be able to tell him all the foolish little intimate things

she was always thinking about him. It—it would be wonderful!

Jacquilyn moved her hands nervously. She was plainly agitated. "They would have to be sort of love letters. The dear boy is out there on the desert working hard, or I wouldn't think of asking you to write them for me. If he was only in some town I could call him up on long distance; but he can't be reached by telephone. I know it's asking an awful lot, but you will do it for me, won't you?"

She looked at Laurel plainly, expecting to be obeyed. Laurel nodded her head in consent. There would be no harm and it would ease the ache in her own heart.

Laurel looked at her own reflection in the mirror as she passed. It seemed more like a masquerade, that she should be dressed in a maid's uniform and cap, than that she was actually working as a maid. Of course it was only temporary. She had always been clever at the art of dolling up her friends, and that talent had been the means of securing her this position, where she had more time to study her books, and could save her money for college in the autumn.

Dully she picked up the fluffy violet chiffon frock her mistress had worn out to dinner that evening. For a brief instant she held it up in front of her as she stopped before the mirror. She was startled at the loveliness of the reflection. The violet of the dress made her own eyes look the color of pansies and brought out the lovely pink in her cheeks. A light from the globe above reflected on her hair, turning it to fairy gold.

"Oh," she said to the image, with a gay little whisper that Jacquilyn couldn't hear, "you could be pretty if you had half a chance."

Jacquilyn Winters was the star of the Play-Art Studios. On the screen she was a beautiful exotic heroine, tender and faithful to the man she loved. In reality she was cold and calculating—mercenary to a marked degree.

Many men had confused the lovely woman of shadow land with the real woman in human form. They paid homage to her, not knowing the woman they worshipped existed nowhere but in their own vivid imaginations.

"I'll sleep to-night with that gold gloss oil on my hair," Jacquilyn said to Laurel, seating herself in front of a low dressing table and looking in the mirror.

Laurel brought out the gold tint bleach. She was glad nature instead of science had given her her own golden hair. And she knew that her own skin possessed a color and charm that all the bottles of beauty lotions could not give to the skin of Jacquilyn. But somehow to-night this knowledge failed to make her glad. Instead it only intensified a longing within her that she, too, might be loved and admired.

Youth didn't last long at best.

Long after her mistress was asleep Laurel lay awake, her thoughts darting here and there, but always returning to wonder why Jacquilyn should have everything that made life worth while. By that Laurel meant the love of Don DuFrane, the famous stage actor from New York. He had come to Hollywood to be featured in the talkies.

Everywhere Don and Jacquilyn were seen together, between time off on their respective sets. What a match they would make—the stage's most famous lover and the screen's most lovely heroine! No wonder Hollywood was all a flutter, as if it were some little

village and the town belle had captured the most eligible bachelor.

LAUREL had first met Don when she was gathering roses for Jacquilyn's breakfast table. He had come swinging up the walk, whistling a gay lilting tune of the hour. They had met at the steps and Laurel had had to tilt back her head to look up into his eyes. They were startlingly close, and she could see little black specks in the dark brown of the iris.

Her first thought was that it was ridiculous for a man to have long eyelashes that curled back from his eyes like a girl's. They gave him a quizzical little boy expression. His hair was dark and brushed back smooth, as if to conceal the wave that would not be hidden. He reminded Laurel more of a college football player than an actor—there was such strength and vitality about him.

He smiled and little crinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes. She sensed rather than saw a flash of white teeth, for something had happened within her—a fierce burning resentment that such a man should fall under the spell of Jacquilyn. She didn't deserve him!

Don followed her through the house into the breakfast room. The table was set for two. Laurel put the roses in a little vase and set it on the table.

Beyond the windows lay the blue Pacific, with the surf rolling in on the clean, hard sand. Jacquilyn had chosen to live here not so much because she enjoyed the ocean and the quietness away from the city as because she wanted to be different. It gave her a sense of superiority that was flattering to her vanity.

To Laurel the place was like living in a dream world. The lovely gardens and green lawns—the kennels and stables, and the different tropical trees; so many that she didn't know the name of them all.

Laurel wished, as she set the halves of grapefruit on the table, that she could say something that would make Don notice her.

"Lovely morning, isn't it?" she asked. How foolish it sounded. The hot color mounted in her cheeks.

"Oh, boy—I'll say it is. I was just wishing there was time for a dip before breakfast. Aren't those breakers swell!"

Don broke off with a grin. Laurel laughed, but it sounded strange to her own ears. Her heart was pounding fiercely. How foolish! Just like the rest of the little fools—falling for a popular actor.

But there was something different about Don. She would have—her heart almost stood still at the thought, for it was true—she would have loved him had he been a truck driver. To sit down to a little breakfast like this before he went to work every morning—a breakfast she herself had prepared—it—it would be heavenly.

Laurel caught her breath with joy and fear. She never knew she could feel this way. If Don had opened his arms to her, she would have gone straight as a homing pigeon into them. Suddenly the truth of it all swept over her. It was terrible—terrible to be so in love with a man who didn't even know she existed, except as a maid in a cap and uniform.

She looked up at him, face flushed, eyelashes raised from pansy eyes. But youth never accepts anything as final, and she suddenly smiled, her eyes misty with dreams. It was wonderful to live in a world where such a person as Don DuFrayne also lived. For no reason

at all she wanted to sing for joy. Oh, but it was good to be alive, be young and in love!

DON turned from the window excitedly. "Look!" he exclaimed to Laurel. "Isn't that a beauty of a point that pup is holding. Boy! He'll make a swell bird dog. There must be some birds in that bush. Look at him—holding it perfectly—knows better than to flush the birds even in play. I only wish I had time to train him better."

Laurel looked at the dog, a pure bred pointer.

"Isn't he lovely?" she gasped. "Where did he come from?"

"I gave him to Miss Winters yesterday. I've raised him from a puppy. He's just a pup yet, but he has wonderful possibilities."

Then followed several magic minutes in which Don spoke of things dear to his heart. Dogs—hunting—horses—following blazed trails up the mountain sides with pack saddles—camping under the stars—a moon rising into an inky sky, red as fire from distant forest fires—its quaint reflection in a lake.

Laurel stood breathless. She was afraid to move for fear he would stop talking. How wonderful it would be to share all these things with him! It seemed he supplied the very need for which her soul had been crying out in loneliness.

Then Jacquilyn came into the room. Instantly Laurel was dismissed and Don rushed to Jacquilyn's side. What he murmured did not reach Laurel. Blindly she stumbled from the room. Her breath came in quick hard sobs. She ran to the sink and turned on the cold water, washing her face in it so that the tears that kept coming to her eyes would not leave any telltale redness.

Outwardly gaining self control, she served breakfast. She was glad when they both left and gave her time to set her thoughts in order. Sadly she thought, "I suppose it will just have to run its course like the measles or smallpox, and some day I'll get over it, but, oh! it hurts now. I—I know I could make him happy. Why did he have to be a famous actor? Why couldn't he have been some home town boy—at least some one who would notice me? It's—it's so hopeless!"

The first few letters Laurel wrote to Don were brief, with a cheerful tenderness. Jacquilyn nodded her approval as she read them, and in turn handed the answers that Don wrote to her to Laurel to be answered.

Laurel began taking long walks with King, the pointer pup, following at her heels. Somehow she felt closer to Don when the pup was around—Little Pup as she called the dog.

One evening returning from a walk she tried to settle down and read. It was useless. She couldn't keep her mind on what she was reading. Every thought was of Don.

She sat down and began a letter to him:

DEAREST:

I've been trying to read, but it is useless. I can't keep my thoughts on mere words. All I want to do is think about you and wish you were here with me. I've been dreaming of the time when you and I will be following blazed trails up mountain sides—making camp under the stars, and be sitting beside a camp fire watching a moon rise from behind the distant peaks.

The dying embers—you and I together, beloved—stillness, broken only by the gentle lapping of the lake on the beach and the whispering of the pines above us.

And then the glorious sunrises—sizzling bacon, coffee pot bubbling over, dough gods cooked before the blaze in long handled skillets. Oh, Don—wouldn't it be fun! And of course we'd have to have Little Pup with us. He'd scare the Injuns away. We'd want him to share our happiness.

Oh, Don—life can be wonderful. It's great to be in love with life; it's thrilling to be in love with love, but best of all is to be in love with you. And, dearest, I do love you—with all my heart and soul I love you. I am just "your woman" and you are "my man." After all, don't that say all that can be said? So now I'll just say good night.

Yours devotedly,

J. W.

In the morning Laurel gave the letter to Jacquilyn to approve. Laurel felt that she had betrayed the secret of her love for Don and stood with flushed face; but Jacquilyn only smiled and said, "Very nice. It will please Don, I'm sure."

Laurel almost began to wish she had not undertaken the task of writing letters to Don for Jacquilyn. It was like keeping a wound from healing.

Then came the time she poured out her love for Don. She looked within her own heart and wrote:

DON—MY BELOVED:

I love you as I've never loved any man before or ever could again. Was I pensive, gay or sad before I met you? I don't know—I can't remember. I only know I began to live the day that I met you.

Little Pup and I have taken a long walk this evening. I think he misses you too. We try to console each other as best we can. We found a lovely little spot far away from every one, where we sat and watched the moonbeams dancing on the ocean. It would have been perfect had you been there to share it with me.

Why is it every beautiful melody I hear—everything I read—makes me wonder how you would like it—makes me wish you were here to share it with me?

Even the trees this evening seemed to be whispering of the time you will hold me in your arms—kiss me—and I'll hear you whispering low so none can hear but me, "Darling girl—I love you!"

And when you look at me, oh, dear boy, nothing else matters in the whole world, but just you and me. And those dear tiny black freckles between your eyebrows and eyelids make you look just a big grown up little boy. How I would love to kiss every one of them!

You must have been an adorable little baby, with big brown eyes and cunning little feet. My heart stands still with the pure joy of what it would mean to me to hold a little child of my very own in my arms that looked just like you when you were a tiny baby. That, my beloved, is the answer to love's quest—to see your own love as a baby—to hold it close, and feel its tiny fingers cling to your own. And to look into your dear shining eyes as you looked down at your first born, nestling in my arms. That is the happiness I want life to hold for me.

Laurel trembled as she stole out into the moonlight to post the letter. She would not let Jacquilyn read it. It was too much part of herself—too sacred. She had dared write to him what she really thought. If she waited until tomorrow to post it the letter would never be sent. In broad daylight it would sound foolish. Moonlight was the stuff dreams were made of. The letter was all right. If Jacquilyn really loved Don the letter would only echo her inmost thoughts, but Laurel could not bear the thought of any one else reading it but Don.

SUDDENLY Don returned. Laurel avoided meeting him when he called for Jacquilyn. Somehow it seemed he would read the secret of her love—know it was she who had written

the letters. Yet when they met face to face, when he and Jacquilyn returned from the theater, he had no eyes for any one save his beautifully gowned fiancée.

Days of misery followed for Laurel. Would there never be any ease for the terrible ache in her heart? She wished she had not written the letters to Don, for they had only revealed to her inner self how much she really did care for him. Little Pup, as she alone called the young hunting dog, was her only solace in these trying days.

Laurel thought that Don must be working very hard, for whenever she did happen to see him he seemed tired and troubled. He was not his happy boyish self.

Jacquilyn was gayly planning for the coming wedding. There were to be many lovely clothes and a honeymoon trip to Paris. Laurel listened to Jacquilyn's plans with aching heart. What cruel irony of fate was it that made Jacquilyn keep insisting that she would take Laurel along?

"You are a treasure, Laurel. I cannot do without you. You must come along with me," Jacquilyn would say.

One afternoon Jacquilyn asked Laurel to serve tea out on the sun porch. With hands she could hardly keep from trembling Laurel set the things before her mistress and her fiancé.

"A honeymoon in Paris—won't that be wonderful, Don?" Jacquilyn was saying. "So many of my friends are over there at present. We can have gay times."

"I—I thought you had different plans, Jackie," Don said diffidently.

"Why did you write them — why?" he demanded

"Oh—you mean that silly mountain trip I wrote you about? I was just feeling sentimental then. No harm done, was there?"

"The things you wrote meant all the world to me. I've been trying ever since I came back to find the you in you that wrote those letters. Jacquilyn—I'd fight through hell for *that* you. The letters—"

"Oh, bother the letters," interrupted Jacquilyn. "Why think about them now! You've got me—we can talk, or would you rather I would be sitting here writing and passing over to you on paper what I have to say to you?"

Laurel's cheeks burned. She wanted to cry out that she had written the letters, yet she knew that was a secret no one would ever tell Don.

Suddenly across the lawn came a streak of brown and white. The hunting pup had escaped from the kennels.

"Go way, King," commanded Jacquilyn, as he dashed onto the porch, but her words were needless, for straight for Laurel the dog rushed.

In a second he was in Laurel's arms, giving her hands moist kisses.

"Oh, Little Pup," said Laurel with a heartachy little gulp. "You're a naughty little pup to run away and come here. Go back—go on back."

With many backward glances the dog returned to the kennels.

Laurel went into the house to wash her hands after caressing Little Pup. When she returned Jacquilyn and Don were nowhere to be seen. Grateful for their disappearance, she set about her work with a heavy heart.

SUDDENLY above her towered Don DuFrayne. His brows were drawn together in a scowl.

"Why did you write those letters to me?" he demanded fiercely.

For a brief second the world spun dizzily around Laurel. She had dreamed of his finding out she had written the letters, but never in a manner like this.

"Why did you? I want to know!" His voice was crisp in its demand.

Laurel forced her eyes to meet his. Up went her chin with a proud little toss.

"Because, Mr. DuFrayne," she made herself say, casually, proudly, "because it was part of the routine Miss Winters required of me."

"I suppose that was your idea of good sportsmanship—creating an illusion of a woman that exists nowhere but in your own imagination? I was a fool to think—I might have known—"

He broke off as words failed him.

Laurel felt something moist touch her hand. She looked down and there was Little Pup, wiggling all over in his eagerness and puppy love.

"Oh, Little Pup," she said, dropping down on her knees and taking him in her arms. Gone was the proud hostile look in her eyes that she had flashed at Don. Instead they brimmed with tears.

"Please go," she said to Don, barely above a whisper. "I want you to go."

"Tell me why you wrote those letters?" Don again demanded, but this time his voice was soft like a caress.

Laurel did not look up.

"Please go," she mumbled from the depths of her arms, where she held Little Pup.

"I won't go until you tell me," Don insisted gravely.

Unsteadily Laurel arose to her feet.

"If you must know, Mr. DuFrayne, I—I wrote them because I—oh, why do you want to know? What difference does it make?"

"All the difference in the world to me. I know now why you wrote them. Little Pup has given away all the dear

foolishness you've poured into his silky ears. And I've loved the woman that wrote those letters from the very first one I read. Don't you think we're wasting time standing here like this? I want to hold 'my woman' in my arms, and—don't you remember what you wrote? I—"

The rest was lost as Don gathered Laurel into his arms.

Sometime later she asked, "How did you know I wrote them?"

Don answered in a voice husky with pride and tenderness. "I knew something was amiss as soon as I came back. Jacquilyn could not fit into the ideas the letters expressed. After visualizing the wonders of real love, I could not be satisfied with anything less. And when you called the dog 'Little Pup,' the same as you did in your letters, I knew the girl of my dreams was you. I immediately had an understanding with Jacquilyn—but—why talk about that? What I want to know is when we can start up that blazed trail for the lake?"

"Any time you say," Laurel murmured from the depths of his shirt bosom, too happy for further words.

Daisies

DAISIES in the meadow,
Daisies on the lea,
I want a bunch of daisies
For my love and me.

A bunch of nodding daisies,
A bunch of daisies white,
All our arms can carry
When we go home at night.

Fortune telling daisies,
That in the meadow grow,
I love, she loves, we both love—
How well the daisies know!

—L. Mitchell Thornton

BETTY-LOU'S LOVE QUEST

The Picture on the Cover

PART I

"All Aboard for Romance!"

ISN'T Betty-Lou a picture as she starts on her vacation? She wears a golden beige frock, with a black cape-coat over it. Her fair curls show—she is letting her hair grow for the first time in its life. Every detail is perfect, down to the tips of her dainty toes in their trim black slippers, and the huge bouquet of roses she carries in her white-gloved hands. She's been saving up a long time for this vacation!

She stands on the observation platform of the Express which will carry her to the shore, and the rest of the office in a body has come to see her off. For Betty-Lou is that rare being, that darling of the gods, a pretty girl who is as popular with her own sex as she is with the boys. She is so little and so sweet that even girls and women have a protective feeling for her, and do not begrudge her the favors that come her way. (Who could be jealous of a baby?)

Tommy, the office boy, has just handed up the sheaf of roses that they've all clubbed together to buy, and under cover of the cheering he whispers:

"You'll write to me, won't you, Betty-Lou? Just once or twice?"

Betty-Lou shakes her head, but her smile takes all the sting out of her refusal or her words.

"You're too young, Tommy."

"Aw, but hang it all, Betty-Lou, I'm old enough to read writin'!"

Betty-Lou appears calm and poised as usual, but her heart is behaving in a most extraordinary fashion. As she passed through the car just now, she saw a Fascinating Stranger. He was starting for the platform, too, and stepped aside to let her precede him. For a long moment their eyes met, and if there is such a thing as Love at First Sight, she read it in his. Her heart stood still, and then began to race as it had never done before. It sent the

blood into her cheeks, and as she came out on to the platform she looked prettier than ever. Now as she stands there, she is acutely conscious of that dark glance upon her, admiring, tender, amused, interested.

Then Tommy leaps down in haste, for the engine shrills and the trainman calls: "All Aboard!" The train pulls smoothly away, and Betty-Lou waves till she is out of sight, longing and yet dreading to turn and meet once more those eyes which wait to tell her the Sweetest Story youth can hear. Life, Love, Adventure, Joy, and Playtime lie ahead of her.

Au revoir, dear Betty-Lou—and bon voyage!

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT: "ONE MAGIC MOMENT"

On the Cover of the July 12th Issue

ON SALE ON ALL NEWSSTANDS JULY 9th

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THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

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Planets of Destiny

Professor GUSTAVE MEYER, Conductor

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

DAILY GUIDE FOR THE FIRST HALF OF JULY

1st—A more or less neutral day, except for those who need a visit to the dentist! Do it to-day.

2nd—For those whose minds turn to the occult, the morning should be fruitful. Afternoon hours would be auspicious for changes of any kind, except those involving the law or lawyers. Keep a tight hand on your money.

3rd—If you must ask her, do it to-day. If she ever says yes, this will be the time.

4th—Wills, leases or any other form of contract, would be signed under good auspices on this day.

5th—A good day to seek favors, if you think them warranted. A successful day for those engaged in anything pertaining to water.

6th—Lie low all day. A day apt to produce accidents, ill temper or arguments; also more concrete losses involving perhaps property or money.

7th—If your success or happiness depends upon some one older than yourself, try to push your interests with them in the morning. Dealers in antiques should prosper during the afternoon hours.

8th—A day for amusements, auspicious both for those seeking and those providing.

9th—A generally inauspicious day. Much better to attend to routine matters. Don't make any important decisions on this day.

10th—Deals which have been hanging fire could be successfully closed to-day. In the afternoon good for seeking entertaining favors, especially from those older.

11th—A neutral day.

12th—Don't write letters you will afterward regret, and don't sign anything which might get you into trouble later. If you have interests involving real estate, push these in

the afternoon, but defer any signatures until a later date.

13th—A day generally best adapted to social affairs.

14th—Guard your temper and do not, regardless of your sex, have any important interviews with women to-day.

15th—A day on which the unexpected is likely to happen.

Miss T. M. A., born May 14, 1884. "has just bought a small café, but things are going pretty slow." Keep on doing your best, because it looks to me as though not later than August or September of this year your financial outlook should brighten greatly. Success comes to you slowly, but surely, and I see no reason why your present venture shouldn't ultimately get going—that is, if you work hard enough, and don't let your actions be dictated by your emotions. People are apt to take unfair advantage of you sometimes because of your sympathetic heart.

There seems to be a run on questions pertaining to ill health this week. Here are four which came to my desk together.

Mrs. M. R., born December 13, 1896; Miss M. K., born November 1, 1903, and Miss A. B., born February 3, 1907, all draw negative answers to their questions.

Sorry, Miss A. B. and Miss M. K., but as to the ex-sweethearts it looks to me as if they would stay ex! Neither of you should regret this, however, because I don't believe that any emotional alliance contracted in the past would work out for your own good. Miss B. should have better prospects next year in late summer or autumn. It may be a little harder for Miss K. to overcome her loyalty to memories, but work at it anyway!

The answer for Mrs. M. R. is that although a reuniting should take place between herself and her husband and children, this does not seem promising until two or three years hence.

The fourth ill health query is from Mrs. E. F. R., born June 5,, 1861. Watch your husband's health, Mrs. R., during the autumn and winter of this year. I should judge that this time would be a critical period for him.

Now for those people who want to know when financial conditions will be most auspicious for them. Take Mrs. F. S., for instance, born December 25, 1901. Inasmuch as you don't give me the hour of birth, I can't do a terrible lot for you, Mrs. S., but I should say, speaking generally, that a very good year for you in money matters will be 1933. Because you are rather inclined to be pessimistic, however, I'll say that you and your husband should find a slight improvement in the autumn of this year.

Mrs. V. I. L., born May 19, 1866. You have had heavy losses, have you not, especially so between 1920 and 1926? Yet 1927 and 1929 were better years. I am glad to be able to tell you that with coöperation on your part, your affairs should take a turn for the better about September of this year, but don't expect the stars to do all the work—roll up your sleeves and see what you can do to help.

Here's Kid Boots, who wants to know whether she and success will ever get together in her present occupation. Inasmuch as you leave me completely in the dark as to what this occupation is, can't do much for you. I know you are inclined to be suspicious and mistrustful, but give me a chance, can't you? General conditions for you look better to me in the autumn of 1931.

Speaking of general planetary conditions you haven't had such good breaks lately, have you, Mrs. J. A. P., born May 7, 1893? "There must be an awful mixup in the stars for me lately; I have had so many disappointments. Will I, with my youngest daughter, be able to go to New England to see my mother this summer?" Might answer the first sentence for you, Mrs. P. For you it would seem to be only a few months until the tide begins to turn. Probably about middle summer you should, speaking astrologically, begin to convalesce.

Miss M. S., born April 18, 1894; Miss E. B., born October 29, 1905; Miss C. C., born December 20, 1910; and "Shorty," born February 28, 1909. "When will I marry?" Well, let's see:

For the slightly undemonstrative Miss C. C., even if she had the opportunity, I wouldn't advise contemplating matrimony before 1935. She is apt to have a bowing acquaintance with romance two years earlier than that. Write to me again then, Miss C. C.

Pleasant emotional conditions for Miss E. B., should obtain from this autumn to the autumn of 1931. But take plenty of time to think it over, Miss B., because you are inclined to possess a rather jealous and selfish love nature; and although this gives you loyalty to a beloved, you could be made very unhappy by meeting the wrong man at the altar.

Miss S. is more particular, it seems. She has already picked a boy friend and only wants me to set the date. No can do, Miss

S. Can only say that I think you will have a better chance for a happy marriage by deferring any attempt until the spring or summer of 1933.

Early part of 1931 will bring good emotional conditions for "Shorty." Her chief detriment seems to be an inability to make up her own mind.

Here's another matrimonial querist just come. Welcome, Miss A. F., born February 6, 1914. If you insist upon marrying the man you are now going with, wait until your eighteenth or nineteenth year.

Travel preoccupies the mind of Miss V. L., born July 10, 1916, but I wouldn't advise her to start out on her journey until early summer of next year—that is, if she wants the very best astrological conditions obtainable. She could journey about a month from now, but would probably get better results by waiting a year. Inasmuch as she is not always sure about her own mind anyway, perhaps it is just as well to wait a while.

"I have been in the military service better than two years, but I am giving it up before long and expect to try for a position. My question is, will I succeed?" But why do you people expect me to reassure you as to your natural abilities before you try them out? Why not give me some hint as to what it is you want to do, and I might be of more help. Shrewd, cautious, restrained, suspicious and mistrustful! With these qualities forming part of your nature, and with intuition added, you ought to be able to make good in any position which requires ability to snoop out the facts. You also have mechanical ability, but the little boy with the arrow finds you such a good mark that he just can't leave you alone, can he? Watch your step, brother. In the late summer of 1931 you will be under good planetary conditions. Try your hardest about then.

There isn't any sky without clouds, and there wouldn't be any clouds without the sun. If you are getting too prolonged a look at the clouds at present, that should mean that you will have a chance to get tired looking at the sun some time, shouldn't it? That is the best I can do with such an overwhelming question, Mrs. H. D. W., born November 24, 1904. "What does the future hold for me? If there isn't a change soon, I don't know what will happen." Can't grant you the right to talk that way until at least twenty years from now. After all, twenty-six isn't senility.

Lot of trouble, Miss S. O., born July 7, 1913, has—or thinks she has. We'll let her step up and speak her piece. "Why is it that at all social functions I am considered popular, yet I never think of marriage with any of my boy friends as a serious career?" Well, if I may speak bluntly, it is just because you are naturally flirtatious and fickle. And if you continue to put off things from day to day permanently some of these days you won't have any boy friends to consider seriously. How's that?

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

PROFESSOR GUSTAVE MEYER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after July 12. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

.....

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

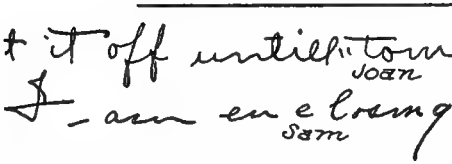
DISSATISFIED and unhappy in her present position Susan N., from Philadelphia, writes me a sad letter about how hard she has worked in a department store for seven years and, as she puts it, "I'm not getting out of the rut. Tell me," she continues, "why some girls get ahead of others who are just as conscientious in the performance of their duty."

Susan is just one of the many who are face to face with the same problem, judging by the scores of letters I receive every week with the same old question, "Why am I such a failure?"

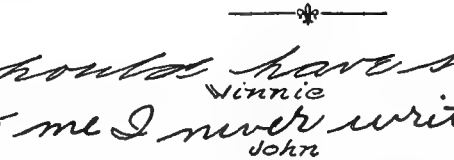
In Susan's case, as in most of the others that I have examined, the willingness to work is there all right. The sincerity of purpose is genuine and unquestionable. But behind all this honesty and integrity there is no dynamic force. Employers to-day are starving to death for new ideas, new methods, quicker turnover, and larger profits. In other words, if you have original ideas, the doors of opportunity will soon swing open to you.

To Susan, as to all the others in the same frame of mind, I would say, don't hesitate to give your employer the benefit of your ideas however humble they may appear in your eyes.

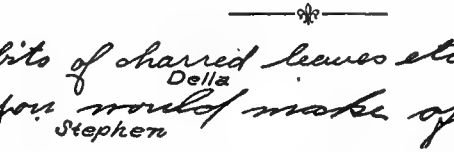
SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS



(Miss Joan H., Cleveland, Ohio.) Your samples of handwriting are indeed a study in contrasts. You, on the one hand, are a rather austere type of girl who doesn't show much emotion at any time. Some men would call you a "cold baby." I would myself. One who takes a lot of "knowing," and continual anxiety and work to keep you interested. The trouble, I think, lies in the fact that your mentality is not very deep. Little interests you outside of your own self, and your own little troubles. Poor Sam must have a pretty miserable time with you when you get into those languid moods, which I see you have a habit of getting into. If the truth were told this boy is far too good for you. His mind is keen and alert. He is a go-ahead young man. You are no stimulus to any man, but rather act on the minds of those with whom you come in contact as a sleeping powder does on a victim of insomnia. In other words, you put the poor chap to sleep with that chronic self-pity of yours. Looking deeper into your nature, you are a girl who loves to put off the "evil day." You never care to do anything at the right time. Procrastination is evidently eating into the vitals of your being. I am sorry to say, Joan, that Sam would make a big mistake in asking you to be his wife. You are not at all suited to each other.



(Winnie J., St. Petersburg, Fla.) In my opinion your choice of sweetheart is a very happy one. John seems to be a boy who has been brought up in a good environment, and his imaginative powers are splendidly developed for a boy of his age. He is much more spiritual than you are, Winnie. He is a thinker and a student. Business is not his forte. He lives in the world of ideas, and gravitates to the higher things of life. To come to yourself, you are a free-and-easy sort of girl. The world is your playground, and its inhabitants are your companions. Your outlook on life is refreshing for a young girl of twenty-two. You are just sentimental enough to be interesting. You are not a mussy sweetheart. In fact, you are rather level-headed when it comes to love. Of course, you have by no means reached the full stature of your womanhood. You have still a lot to learn; but John will be a power for good to you, as the years go by. I have no hesitation in saying that you two young folk ought to be very happy in your married life.



(Miss Della P., Asbury Park, N. J.) You and Stephen are pretty well-suited to each other. Before the wedding day comes off, however, I would advise you to have a heart-to-heart talk with your future husband. There are several weaknesses in his make-up which would be all the better straightened out before the minister pronounces you husband and wife. For example, Stephen has a rather obstinate nature. Pig-headed I would call him. Being

HANDWRITING HINTS:

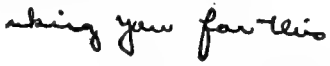
IF YOUR FINAL STROKE IN EACH WORD IS DRAWN OUT LIKE THIS:

—it indicates that you have a self-sacrificing nature. You are always willing to go out of your way to help other people. You have also a vivid imagination and are often very liberal with money and advice.

IF YOUR PENMANSHIP IS SMALL AND YOUR LETTERS LOW, LIKE THESE:

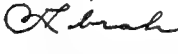
—you are sure to have great power of concentration. Small writers are always good thinkers and sound reasoners. Nothing is ever too small for your observation. It also shows great mental refinement.

IF YOU MAKE YOUR "T" BARS ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE STEM, LIKE THIS:



—it is a sure sign that you are one who loves to put off the "evil day." You are a procrastinator, and one who can never be depended on to fulfill an engagement. It is nothing to be proud of. You may be very active, but you never accomplish much.

IF YOUR CAPITALS ARE GRACEFULLY ORNAMENTED LIKE THIS ONE:



—you may be a person with good taste, but you also have a good conceit of yourself. You are proud, and inclined to be haughty. You believe in lots of display and palaver.

naturally alert and "keyed up" all the time, this boy is irritable and sensitive, and would require to be handled with kid gloves, as the saying is. Regarding your own nature, Della, you are not so forceful as your fiancé. You haven't got the same self-assurance as has Stephen. You don't seem to be able to stand up for your rights sufficiently. A girl of your age, however, twenty, has much to learn in the way of worldly wisdom. We can't put an old head on young shoulders, so I would just say as you get older you will learn gradually that it is every one for himself in this world, and the devil take the hindmost! I am wishing you the best possible luck and hoping to hear from you again.

a girl nearly eighteen years
Adelaide
Be sure whose time
Henry

(Miss Adelaide N., Syracuse, N. Y.) Judging by your pen-formations both of you are well above the average in intellect and education. Your "boy friend," as you call him, has evidently got a quick and virile brain, while you possess a rather imaginative mind. You take many flights with your imagination, and build many "castles in Spain" in the course of a week. Altogether, you are a well-matched couple, and are capable of supplying each other with the necessary sympathy and inspiration when difficulties come your way. You asked me to tell you about Henry's weaknesses. I was hoping you wouldn't trouble trouble till trouble troubled you! However, if you must know, I would say in the first place that Henry requires a little more backbone. He hasn't much pep when it comes to striving for success. In many respects, he is too sensitive for a man. He has the temperament of an artist and a man who loves his books. Sentimentally, you are well suited to each other, and ought to have many happy moments in each other's companionship. I see no reason why you two should not be really content in the holy bonds of matrimony.

YOUR CAREER

send me an analysis

(Miss Winifred J., New York City.) Your virile pen strokes reveal to me that you are a girl with a scintillating personality. Your mind is active every minute of the day. Nothing escapes you when you are around the house. When you get married to some rich man who can afford to keep a butler and a few maids, your help won't have a China-man's chance to skip the corners when spring cleaning is on! Every hole and corner will have to be open for inspection if you have anything to do with it. Whether this is an ideal disposition or otherwise, is a matter of opinion. If I had to be in your company day after day, I'm afraid you would drive me crazy in a week. You are by no means an easy person to live with, Winifred. You are far too erratic and excitable. In a word, you have such a fiery little nature that you burn yourself up before the day is half over. The result is there is simply no living with you. On the other hand, you are cultured to the finger tips. I imagine you carry yourself well at any social function, and on such occasions are correct both in style and in speech. I cannot close this analysis without pointing out the fact that self-satisfaction runs all over you, and behind that benign smile of yours there lies a lot of self-puffery. This habit of showing off is far from being a commendable one, whether it be in a man or a woman.

I guess it won't do me

(Miss Bessie A., Yonkers, N. Y.) Your candid way of expressing yourself regarding your qualifications for a position has made me doubly anxious to help you. Personally, I feel that you are wasting your time in this candy factory. However good the salary is, "for doing next to nothing," as you put it, I feel that your brain is in "neutral." It pays no one to wait for opportunities in this world. The point that you should once and for all settle is, what profession is going to bring you the maximum amount of happiness, and, of course, the most remuneration? After analyzing your penmanship, I would say that

you are best suited to architectural work. If is true that this is a contrast to putting candies "to bed in a box," but your analytical powers lead me to suggest blue prints for a successful career. Seek the counsel of some reputable architect in your city, and you will find that his advice will coincide with mine.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

of Character, I don't already

(Miss Jessie D., Santa Monica, Cal.) You impress me as a girl who believes in moderation. "Use, but not abuse" seems to be your motto. You do not like to be hurried in your decisions. You evidently take your pleasures as you take your emotional expressions, without undue emphasis. I observe a great deal of self-consciousness and self-restraint in your character. Your mind is of the constructive type, and your imagination is well controlled by your intelligence. Your power of concentration doesn't amount to much. You are inclined to fly from one thing to the other much too readily. Your mind has a nasty habit of wandering away from the problem on hand. You get to thinking about other unrelated things. When it comes to generosity with money, you are there "with the goods." I believe you would be very generous and thoughtful to those who were worse off than yourself. I would also say that you can make yourself very agreeable when in company, and particularly so when in the company of men. You evidently appeal to the male sex and as a result get more "kick" from their companionship than from that of women.

for I am not, at present, in

(Miss Louise W., Montreal, Can.) I observe that you are a woman possessing great individuality, and you ought to be successful in almost anything you undertake, whether it be in the management of a home, the running of a club, or the direction of a business enterprise. You are seemingly blessed with a genius for success. You also possess very good judgment, and have a fine sense of discrimination. You like to do your own thinking before you act rather than afterward. In your personal and outside affairs you are a great lover of order. It would be hard for you to be patient with some one who is persistently slovenly and untidy in his work or person. A glimpse at the other side of your nature reveals to me that you are very sensitive. You are far too willing to think that people mean to offend you when, in reality, that is the thought farthest from their minds. Another thing that you would do well to keep under cover is that decided strain of pessimism. Keep off the mourners' bench as much as possible. There are enough wailers in the world without you. If you are worrying about your past mistakes, for goodness' sake go out and give them a decent burial.

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after July 12. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
—Character Analysis.
(Check which you prefer. One coupon must accompany each choice.)

Name.....

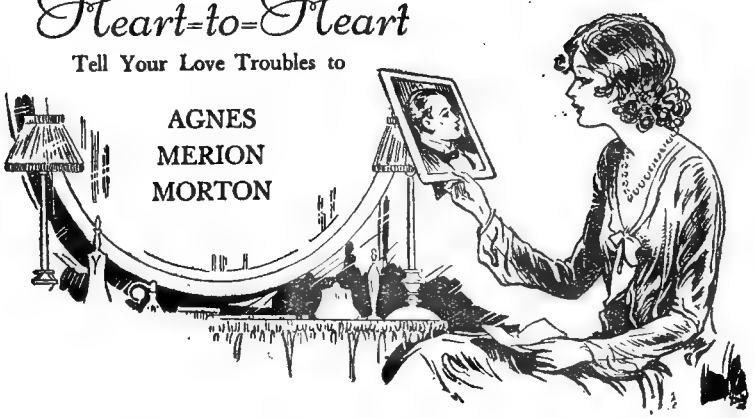
Street and No. .....

City..... State.....

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
MERION
MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have just read Kala Straus's letter, which you invited the readers of ALL-STORY to answer. Both Kala's story and mine are identical, and that is why I am writing. Although I can offer her no solution to her problem, I can at least sympathize.

I am a Jew. I love and am loved by a Catholic girl. We met over nine years ago, and kept company for over a year, but when we wanted to marry our parents forbade it. My parents swore that they would mourn me as dead, that I would have to leave home and never come back. I knew that my mother never could get over it, if I married the girl I loved. After all, she is my mother. Her father threatened to make her a widow if she married me. We finally decided to separate and not see each other again, believing no good could come of our marriage. We would have been friendless.

I am doing just what Kala's sweetheart did. Even the occupation is identical—I am an airplane pilot. I see her every three or four years. She has married the man of her parents' choice, and he has turned out to be a beast and a drunkard. He beats her and the children, and is brought to court often for wife beating and public intoxication. As for me, I still love her. No other girl has been able to hold my interest. Of course, I avoid seeing my old sweetheart; I seldom stay in the United States for more than sixty days.

I know how Kala feels; I love my mother, too. But my advice to Kala is to marry the man she loves, regardless of what may come. Her mother would eventually reconcile herself to the marriage, and so would his folks, too. After all, we must live our own lives in our own way. If Kala and her sweetheart really love each other, the rest will iron out itself. Nothing can withstand a true love, and all the world loves a lover. If not now, perhaps a year or five years from now, but eventually Kala and her boy will be taken back to the bosoms of their families.

A SYMPATHIZER.

DEAR KALA STRAUS:

I have read your letter and my heart goes out to you. I truly hope I can help you. I am going to tell you just what I think and would do in your place, also something of myself. I am thirty-five years old, married, and a Protestant. I believe that there are very

few marriages sanctioned in heaven except the ones that are founded on such love as yours; further, whether you are of Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant faith, there's only one God and one heaven for all of us that truly serve Him. We all have the same temptations, trials, and tribulations here on earth. If your parents and his can't forgive you, then they are not right. That's a flat statement, but it is what I believe. I have very dear friends in both faiths, and I never think of their religion.

You are of age; you have your own life to live. Why spoil it? Do you think either of you could live better than you are trying to do? Your suffering might drive you farther from your religion, instead of bringing you closer to it. One owes a certain duty to one's family, but not enough to wreck their lives for. I know that if I had a daughter I wouldn't stand in her way, but would try to make the man she loved welcome.

My husband and I had our differences, too, although it did not happen to be religion. Yet we are very happy. Maybe you would like to know how we manage to be, with so much unhappiness around us? When we were first married I made Ned's people my people, and tried to be as good to them as I was to my own family. It was hard, for I was a Kentucky girl and he a New Englander of the old Puritan stock, and they don't look on any outsider with favor. He considers my family the same way, but maybe if I had taken a different attitude I wouldn't have this story to write.

I knew my hubby was like millions of others, with temptations and a lot to overcome. So am I. Neither of us expects more than we can give. We are fifty-fifty in all things, good or bad, feast or famine. We both work; we both play, but not with others. We are neither of us jealous. He is very popular with both sexes; I am not. I love to see him admired by women, but if I were jealous then I know I would drive him from me. He loves me because I give him credit for being human, and trust him still. A man will think over breaking that trust.

We have had many misunderstandings, but instead of fighting we get together and talk it over and forget about it. Neither will bring up an unpleasant subject that has been thrashed out and settled, that belongs to the past. We live for the future, and try to forge ahead, not drift back. Future thoughts are pleasant, usually. At present he is working in another place, and we see each other only every two or three weeks.

I send my best wishes to you both, Kala, and thanks, Mrs. Morton, for your interesting department.

CITY INSTITUTION HOUSEKEEPER.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have read your advice to the lovelorn, and I think you will help me. I am eighteen years of age and in love with a man of thirty-eight. I started going steady with him about a year ago, but he is married and has four children. Away back last spring they agreed to separate, and she took the children with her.

I know he loves me and I love him. I have to meet him on the quiet because if my people knew they would surely make a lot of trouble, but, Mrs. Morton, I am just a little jealous of his children. He can only see me every other Sunday because he takes them out the Sunday in between. I think I could overcome that if I tried, but it seems every time I see them I think that I have taken their father from them. Mrs. Morton, I am not that type.

He tries to make me see what I am going into, but I cannot agree with him on this. He wants me to stop going with him for a year and go out with younger people, and if I still care for him at the end of that time we can be together again. But I don't want to —I only want him.

Do you think, Mrs. Morton, we could find happiness together if we married? I think I could, but I do not think he could. I believe he would start thinking about the children, and in time blame me for taking him from them. I also think if we had children he would not love them as he does the others. Do you believe my fears and doubts are unfounded?

MARIANNE.

Your problem is indeed a serious one, and I hope you really want me to tell you exactly what I think, and not just to assure you that you are right. My experience and observation have taught me that there can be no true companionship, except in the very rarest instances, between people who are so far apart in age. Think. This man might have been your father—he is old enough. He belongs to another generation, and there have been such great changes in the upbringing of young people in the last few years that the generations are farther apart than they ever were before. By the time you are in the prime of life, your full maturity, he will be an old man.

When one is in love one sees only the desirableness of the loved one; but marriage opens the eyes. You would gradually but surely come to feel that you and this man were too far apart, that you do not look at things the same way, that you do not like the same things, nor want to do the same things.

Of course your "jealousy" of his children is natural, but what sort of man would he be if he did not love them and want to be with them when he can? I think he is very fine, and very wise, to want you to separate for a while and test out this affection you feel for each other. It is exactly the advice I would have given you if he had not suggested it. So why not trust us, dear? We are both older than you, and have seen this problem worked out many times, and we know it would be fairer all around, particularly to yourself,

if you could make up your mind to this separation for a while. If your love is the real thing, if you and he are one of those rare couples meant for each other in spite of the disparity in age, you will stand the test. If not, certainly it will be better for you to find it out before marriage than after.

I know that one can love at eighteen, but it is not a mature woman's affection. You haven't known enough young people of your own age yet to be sure that you prefer an older man. Give the boys a chance, Marianne! You won't regret it, even if you continue to love this man best. You will be surer of yourself. No, your fears are not unfounded. You would doubtless make him very unhappy if you really had to separate him from his first little family. Don't try to do that in any case. A lovely young girl has the right to her own life, her own man—not some other woman's. And I believe, if you are strong and brave now, another love will come to you some day that will make this one look pale and weak, and you will realize your first love was only a preparation for that bigger, finer feeling.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

You are asking me to look upon you as a friend. I am confronted with an old, old problem. Mrs. Morton, I am engaged to be married, and have a lovely ring. Dick is wonderful to me. But there is a boy I like very much. I went to all parties with him while still in school. I love Dick and yet I get a thrill when the other boy is mentioned. I am in good friendship with his cousin, and she and I get to talking, of course. We had a little misunderstanding, neither was to blame, but we drifted apart.

So many little things come up that happened while we were going together. The cousin when I speak of these happenings says that "Some one else says I'll never forget that, either." Meaning "him." I am sure he talks of me to her, for her actions say so. Whenever we meet on the street, no matter who I am with, even Dick, he speaks. Lots of times when I am alone when we meet and he speaks to me he seems to want to say more, but is perhaps afraid of himself.

Mrs. Morton, I love Dick, respect him, trust to the fullest degree, yet I feel that I am doing him a wrong. I can't help it, though. I try not to let the other boy arouse a little more than, perhaps, a friendly interest. Dick is of a jealous nature, and was deathly jealous of him, but he has changed now. He has even asked the other boy several times to ride with us to a distant town.

Even now Dick is waiting for me to set the date for our marriage. He knows that I used to go with the other boy, for I told him before I ever consented to go steady with him. He knows, too, that I chose between the two of them when he asked me to go steady. I chose him. I thought I had forgotten the other, but it seems as though I haven't. His cousin said his mother asked him why he didn't go with a girl from here, and he told her that the one he wanted he couldn't have, and that he hadn't the sense to know it when he had the chance to get her, and now it was too late. His cousin looked me full in the eye and later in her conversation she just the same as told me that the "one" was me.

Mrs. Morton, there are many other things, too. He tried to and did go steady with another girl, but quit her. His cousin asked him why and he said, "She doesn't come up to my expectations. I thought she was like *her*." Meaning me. His cousin tries, I think, to make him believe he still has a chance. But I feel that he knows my way, for after I have given my word or promise it is never broken. Oh, if there was only some way of coming to an understanding, but I don't feel it is my place to take the step that might perhaps ruin three lives, and I wouldn't hurt Dick for anything. But, Mrs. Morton, I don't feel that I am doing the right thing by Dick to marry him, and still have thoughts in my mind of the other boy. Dick is twenty, so is the other boy, and I am nineteen, so you see we are all young.

Please give me your *frank* opinion, for I really want to know. Please don't just tell me to forget "him," for I have tried for a year and a half. Do you think I ought to tell Dick I can't marry him? I know it would break his heart. They both call me

HONEY.

I wonder if you will believe what I tell you, and try to do what I ask, which is—wait. It isn't only because you are so young, but because you are so unsettled in your mind. And also because both the boys are so young. Why, Honey, they are just boys, hardly more than children, not marriageable men. No young lad of twenty or twenty-one is fit to be a girl's husband. He hasn't the mentality, nor the physical stamina, nor the financial footing, nor any of the other qualities that are essential for a marriage that will wear.

And you yourself have not had enough experience yet, nor enough good times, to undertake the responsibility and cares of matrimony. Marriage is not fun, Honey; it is not a game; it is a twenty-four-hour job. Girls in their teens, as a rule, never realize what it means to be married. It's romantic to be engaged, of course, and have a "lovely ring," but marriage is something else again. They think about *getting* married, not about *being* married. They think about the glamour and excitement of the wedding, and the pretty new clothes, and the honeymoon. They don't think of the year-in-year-out task of getting up early in the morning to cook a man's breakfast, about keeping his clothes in order, about cleaning his house, and washing out the tub after him, and bearing his children—*and* bringing up those children.

Don't you see, Honey, what a lot of love, and understanding, and patience, and interests in common it takes to make a successful marriage? You ought to be a bit farther advanced on the road, and have known a few more men, and have grown up to the woman you are going to be before you have the right idea of who is or who is not suitable for the companion of your whole life. The girl you are has no sure means of knowing that. As for having given your word, it would be a great deal better to take it back than to keep it and be miserable all your days, and make Dick miserable, too. Better break a promise than a life.

Give Dick back his ring, or at least tell him that you want to wait a while, until he is better established, and you know each other better. When you have told him the truth it will be all right to try to get acquainted with the other boy again. Find out which of them is truly congenial and more congenial; which of them sees eye to eye with you upon the things that really matter. But don't bind yourself to either of them by an absolute promise for two or three years yet. It isn't fair to marry Dick, or anybody, while you don't know your own mind. And it isn't fair to any boy of twenty to take him seriously. You might grow up together, and then again you might not—it is more than likely that you will grow up into two entirely different people from the boy and girl you are now, and that's about as tragic a thing as can happen to two people who are tied to each other.

I don't want to seem unsympathetic, but no one who read your letter could urge you to go ahead. Neither do I want to seem unflattering, but I hardly think you need worry about breaking anybody's heart. You'll be surprised how quickly he gets over it. We can any of us bear a little disappointment in love now and then, but we carry the scars of an unhappy marriage to our graves. You have one life to live. Why throw it away?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have something to talk over with you, and I know that you will help me. A few months ago I went to a skating carnival and met a very interesting young fellow from a near-by town. I have a girl friend over there, and she introduced me to him, and since then she has asked me to come over and spend the night with her several times, and she would invite this young man to come for the evening with her boy friend, and we would play cards, and dance to the radio, and then make a little supper in the kitchen. My girl friend and her boy friend have known him for years, so you see he is all right.

He and I took to each other right away. He has told me since that he fell in love with me when he saw me skating, before we even were introduced. Mrs. Morton, he is such a dear. Whenever we are parted for more than a few days he writes to me, and he comes to see me all the time, and takes me to the movies. My mother and father like him, and he likes them, but they don't know how serious it is. One Sunday he drove me to see his sister and her children, and she made it very pleasant for us. We had a wonderful day.

Agnes, he is just crazy about me, and the more I see him the more I love him. He has asked me to marry him and I said I would. We are thinking of waiting until next winter because he will have a promotion then. Mother does not know this because we have not told her, and I am afraid to, for fear she will make a fuss. I am twenty-one. Don't you think that is old enough to get married without your mother's consent? We are planning just to slip away quietly when the time comes and not tell anybody until it is all over. Do you think that would be all right? You see, I don't know how she would take it if I told her. I am the only girl and she has always said she wants me to stay home. But I love Ray so. We agree about everything, and I know we can be happy together. What would you do in my place? Please don't tell me I am too young to know my own mind.

DOROTHY DAVIS.

Well, Dorothy, I can't see that you have any good reason for keeping a secret from your dear mother about such an important thing as the marriage of her only daughter. I'm sure that if you married without her knowledge or consent she would be justified in making a "fuss," and that it would be a much bigger one than if you told her of your love for Ray now and let her become reconciled to the idea.

I also doubt that you could keep her from knowing of your feeling for each other if you continue to be together so much for the next few months. And why should you want to? You have told us nothing to make us think she is any different from any other mother. She does not want to lose her girl, of course, but she knows that children do marry and do leave home.

It will hurt her infinitely less to be in your confidence, to help you with your trousseau and with your plans for your home, to share in your happiness, than it would to be kept in the dark and some day rudely informed that you had gone off and got married on the sly. I don't believe you quite understand how much that would hurt her, Dorothy, or you would not think of doing such a thing. Try to imagine what it would be like if you had a daughter of your own and she treated you so. Tell her right away. I believe and hope you are going to be very happy, but you must start out right so that you will deserve to be.

The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Can't I have pen pals, too? I am a girl fifteen years old, have brown hair cut in boyish bob, am a regular tomboy, and have brown eyes. I just love sports, and oh, boy, can I dance? I'll say I can! But say, I want pen pals, and I want lots of them—the more the better. Am I going to get them? I'll see by the size of the mail box.

MAYRE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

I bought my first copy of ALL-STORY this week and enjoyed every bit of it. I thought I'd like to join your club with the hope of making new friends. I am a girl of nineteen, quite tall, with light brown hair and gray eyes. I don't think I would ever qualify for a beauty contest, but am quite popular anyway. Music, especially the piano and pipe organ, comes first with me. I hope to be an organist soon, and I teach music now. It is certainly interesting, too. Tennis and swimming are my favorite sports, but as for golf, I am certainly a failure at that. Letters from all parts of the globe will be welcome, and I promise to answer every one that I receive.

TOBY OF CANADA.

Nothing would make me happier than to join your Lonesome Club. Please accept my plea and help me find some pen pals. Lonely, very lonely, for pen pals. I hardly ever have any letters. I have many friends, but no correspondents. I'm desperate—I must have some! Please, ALL-STORY readers, write to a lonely, letterless, curly-haired girl of fifteen.

BOBBY JASMINE.

I would love correspondents all over the United States and old Mexico, as I would like very much to correspond with a few Spanish girls about my own age, and if any of you girls have brothers I've no objections. I am twenty, like sports of all kinds, also reading and writing. I am five feet three, weigh one hundred and three, have light brown hair and gray eyes.

JUST HELENE.

I am not so terribly lonely, but would like to receive letters and will answer all. I am five feet tall and weigh ninety pounds. I have curly brown hair and blue eyes, and am fourteen years of age. I love nearly all sports, and especially dancing and reading. Mrs. Dale, if you put my plea in your department, please sign me by my nickname.

HONEY.

I would like to join your Lonesome Club, and make friends with girls from any part of the globe who would like a steady pen pal. I have auburn hair, brown eyes, am twenty-four, medium build, five feet four and a half inches tall. My hobbies are movies, reading, writing, fancywork, and I collect postcards, souvenirs and stamps. Come on, girls, all write to.

NATIVE OF CALIFORNIA.

I'm a lover of all outdoor sports, especially horseback riding and driving cars. Won't girls from all over the country write to me? I will give souvenirs to any who write from England, Africa, Europe, South America, Hawaii, Cuba, or any other foreign country. I'll try to make my letters as interesting as possible, so come on, folks, and shower me with letters.

MRS. T. R. B.

I wonder if by any chance there is room for me in your club, as I would appreciate it very much if you would find me a pen pal between eighteen and twenty-five. I am eighteen, have brown eyes and light brown hair, weigh one hundred and ten, I like to write and receive letters, and will also send a snapshot. Well, here's hoping I get a stack of letters.

HELEN OF MONTANA.

If I were to write all the nice things I think of you and your darling club, I'm sure I'd still be writing twenty-five years from now, so in a few words I'll say, "It's great!" I loved your other department, "In Confidence," also. Won't you please print my plea for pals? I've loads of writing material to get rid of, so won't some one write to a lonesome girl with russet-brown hair, dark brown eyes, and a fair complexion? Am eighteen and like all sports. So grab a pen, pencil, or most anything, and drop a line to

MARIAN OF MASS.

DEAR PALS:

Can you squeeze a little closer and let a North Dakota girl in? We have just moved to Wisconsin, and I am very lonely. I am nineteen, have blue eyes, light hair, weigh one hundred and ten, and am five feet three. Love to dance, skate, hike, swim, and ride, and am an all-round good sport. Come on, folks, let's have action. Because I am always whistling I'm known as

WHISTLIN' PETE.

Hello, Mrs. Dale! Any objections to having "Chicago Grace" crash your party and cut herself a slice of your "Friendship" cake? You yourself can choose any icing you wish for me. If I swear upon my word of honor not to send any "soup" or "pineapples" through the United States mail, will that be enough to give your pen pals that "quiet, comfortable feeling" toward me, or will they still be afraid to write to a girl from the so-called gangster land? I dare every one from everywhere to trust and take as a pen pal

CHICAGO GRACE.

I am fourteen years old, and would like very much to correspond with young people between fourteen and eighteen. I have blond wavy hair, blue eyes, and I am five feet four. I am a sophomore at high school, take violin and elocution lessons, and also take other lessons! Please write to me, for I am seeking pen pals as I am a lonely girl. I will exchange snaps if you wish.

DOT OF CONNECTICUT.

I should be extremely grateful if through the medium of your magazine you could put me into touch with pen friends. I am an Englishwoman, thirty years of age, and hold an important educational traveling post, which enables me to see the greater part of the world. I am at the moment in the Canal Zone. I should prefer to exchange correspondence with those who are seriously interested in travel, literature, or country life, to exchange snapshots, newspapers, and botanical specimens. I am also fond of all forms of sport and particularly sculling, walking, and folk dancing. I read very much and take interest in arts and crafts; therefore, I should enjoy receiving letters from any one interested in any one of these things.

A. E. E.

Could you find a pen pal for me? I am a girl of fifteen, with blue eyes, brown wavy hair, and I am five feet three. My main hobbies are reading, writing, dancing, and many sports. I am willing to exchange snapshots also. Come on, everybody, and write to

RUDY.

Here is my plea to become a member of your club for lonesome folk. Am not so lonesome as I used to be, but yet am plenty so-so. Am sixteen, a brunette, five feet seven short, weigh about one hundred and thirty, and, though not too popular, have a good time everywhere. Love to dance and swim quite a lot, as I live right on two shores of a large bay. Will explain if any who read this care to hear. Hoping my letter is published soon, and to get many new friends,

JUST SO-LONESOME HAPPY.

I would just love to have some nice pen pals. I adore all kinds of sports, and I love to receive letters. I read that you're supposed to describe yourself, so here goes! Brownish red hair, dark blue eyes, fair complexion, and weigh one hundred and five. I am also a movie fan. I will answer all letters sent to me. Well, toodle-oo; I must be toddling. Here's hoping for stacks of pen pals!

AN EAGER PEN PAL OF NEW JERSEY.

We're two sisters who enjoy getting letters. Yes! And writing them, too. So come on, everybody! Grab your pen and make the mailman earn his wages. We love everything that

means good times, as we believe in having a good ol' time while we are young. Isn't that a good motto, people? We want a letter from every State in the United States, so get busy and represent your State. Send snapshots if you can. The younger, Jack, is a brunette, and nineteen, and Pete, the older, is a blonde and twenty-three. Take your pick and step on the gas!

JACK AND PETE.

I am five feet four, and weigh one hundred and forty. I have brown hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. I am an athletic girl, very fond of tennis, baseball, basketball, swimming, boating, dancing, skating, etc. My hobbies are reading, photographic collecting and shows. I have had some very interesting experiences and am interested in almost anything. I have traveled to England, France, and Belgium. I would like to hear from girls from the States in particular, as I am a Canadian. Here's hoping I receive my share of letters, which I will gladly answer promptly. By the way, I'm nineteen, but would like letters from people aged ten to fifty. All success to your department!

RUFUS FROM CANADA.

Well, here's me on black and white—five feet nine, blue eyes, blond hair, twenty-two years old. Brunettes are my weakness. I live on a farm at present, though I don't stay on a farm. The last place I worked was Battle Creek, a fine little town in Michigan. I'm a born cowboy. Now, all who want a picture of me when I was nursing cows will have to be fast, for the first one I hear from gets the picture.

BERT OF ARKANSAS.

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Her Bartered Beauty .....

Moanin' Low .....

An Innocent Vampire .....

Honeymoons to Order .....

The Love Line .....

Heart Insurance .....

The Loyal Heart .....

How to Find Romance .....

Cupid in Overalls .....

Revelation of Love .....

Love Letters .....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)